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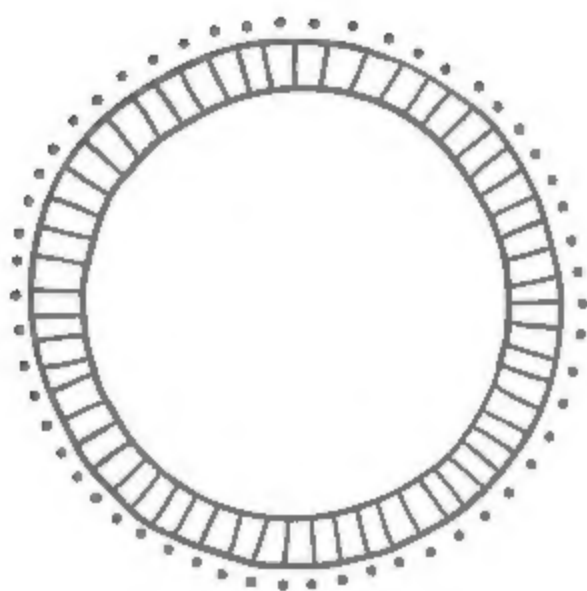
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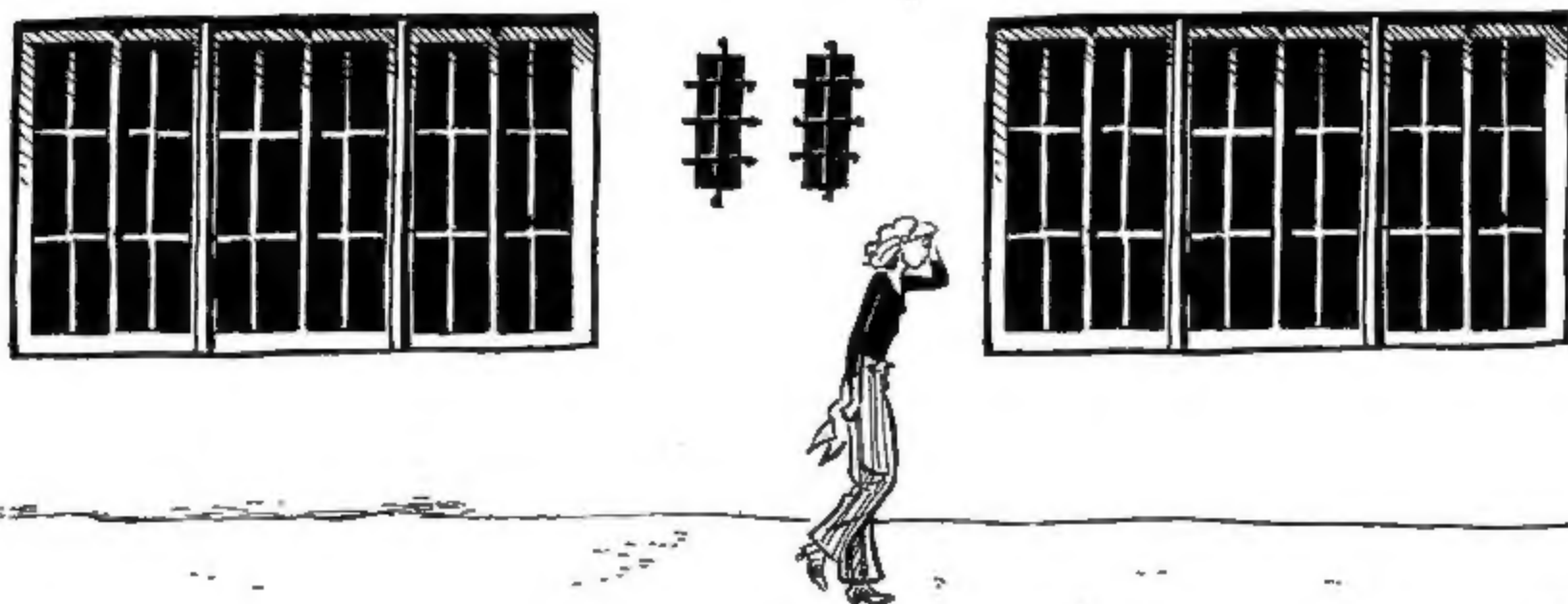
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DARK HORSE BOOKS
A division of Dark Horse Comics, Inc.
10956 SE Main Street
Milwaukie, OR 97222

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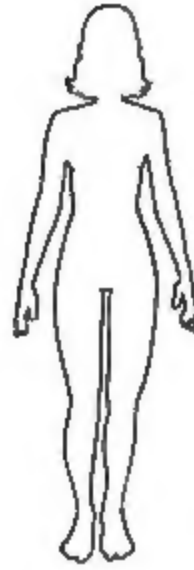
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First Edition: February 2011
ISBN 978-1-59582-651-0

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Printed by Transcontinental Gagné, Louiseville, QC, Canada.

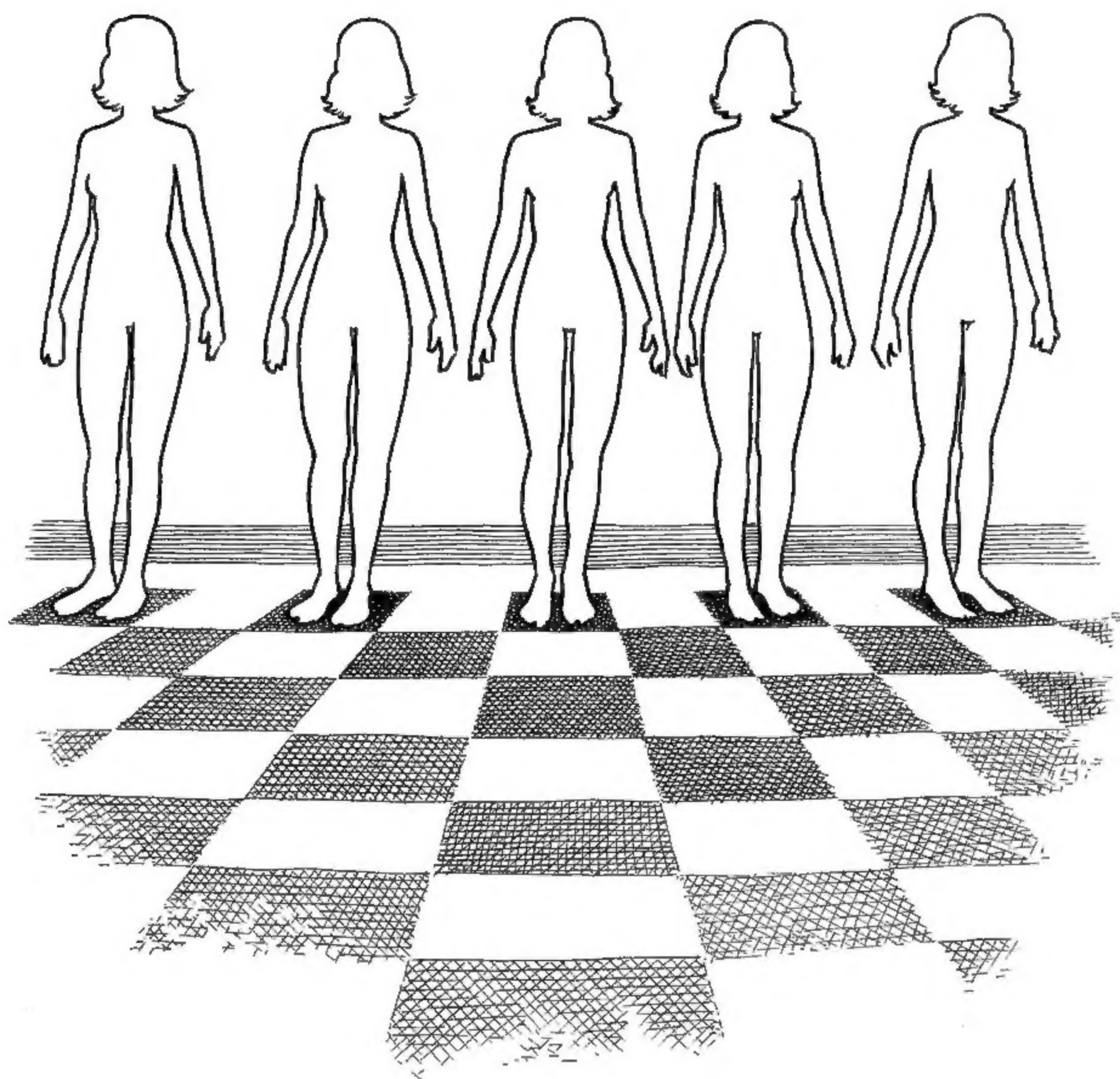
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To all the little red deviled-ham devils in my life, who put colds in my kids, ice in my driveway, migraines in my brain, and great ideas about ceasing to sell my art supplies into the minds of my local shops, all when I have a killer deadline that I should have been able to steamroll like a coked-up quarterback.

IN YOUR FACE, gibbering cartoon imps!

one:





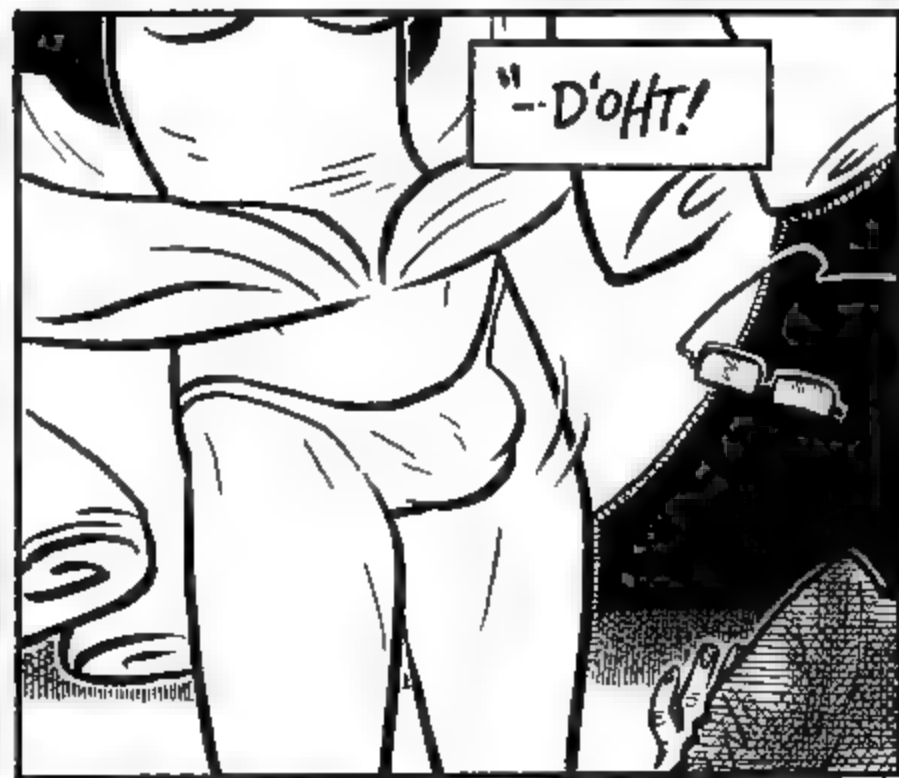




"-- BUT IT'S THE
INTERCLAN JUDGES
SHE HAS TO IMPRESS--"



"--AND HER OWN
CLAN'S JUDGE IS
NO SOFTIE--"



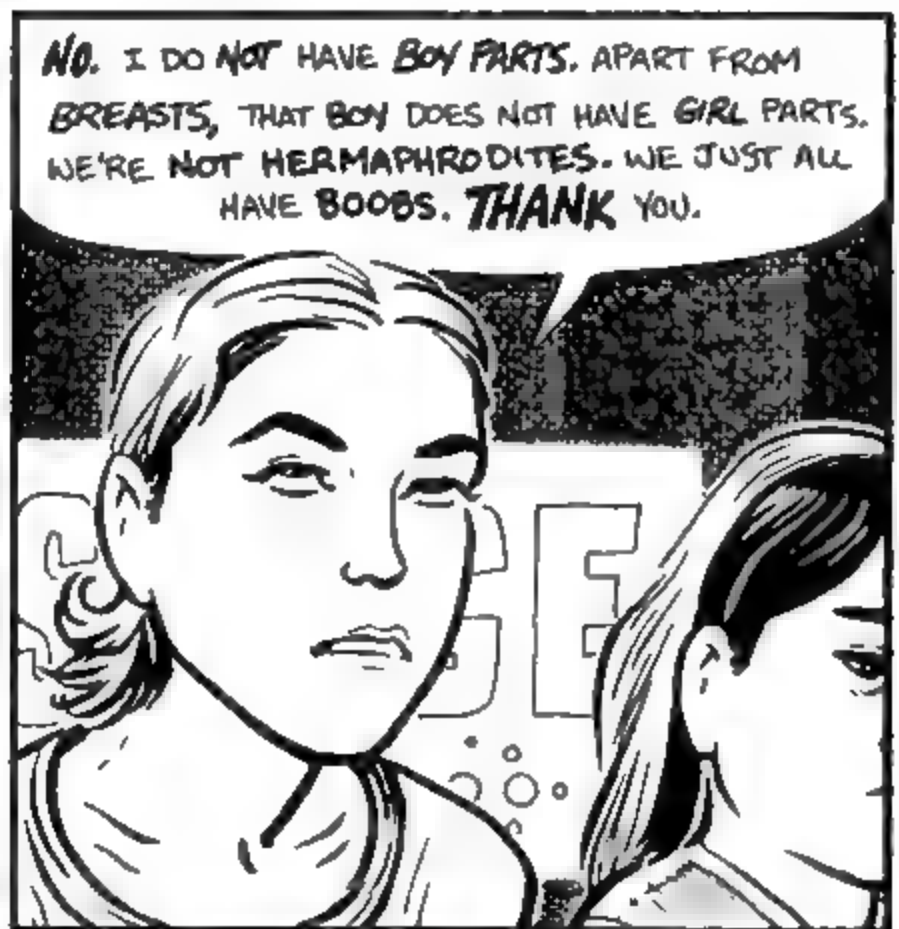
"--D'OHT!"



"OH LORD, I GUESS THAT'S
WHY THEY CALL THEM **BALL**
GOWNS, HAHA... SONNY,
THAT'S GONNA COST YOU
SOME POINTS!"

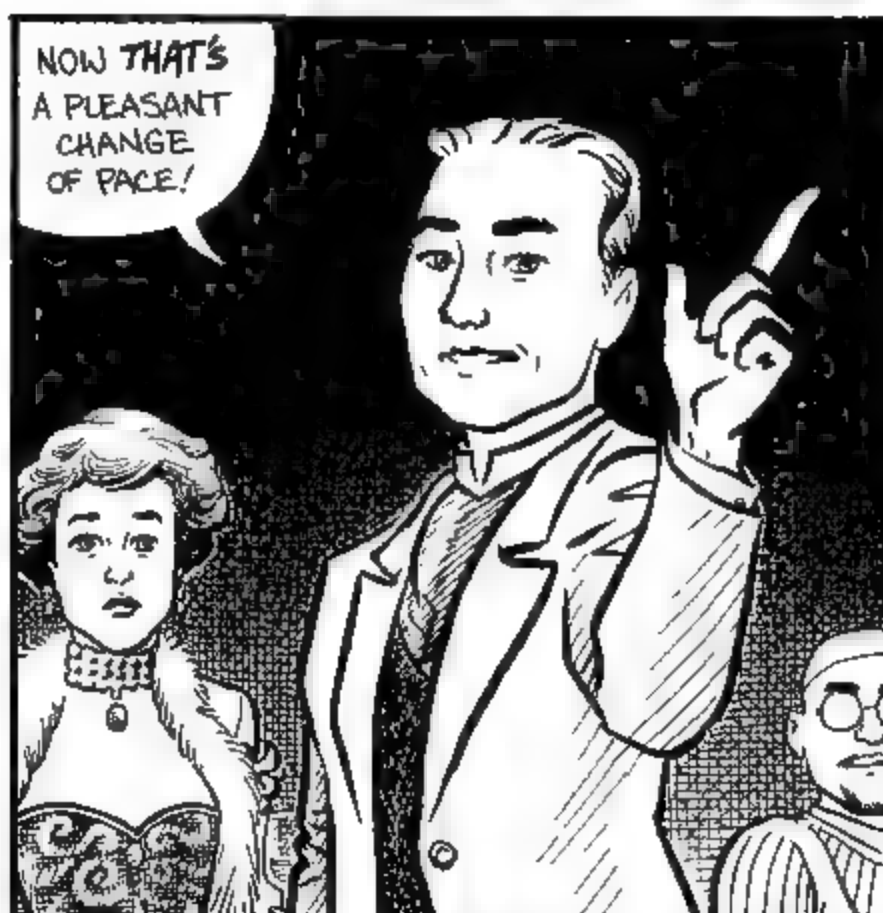






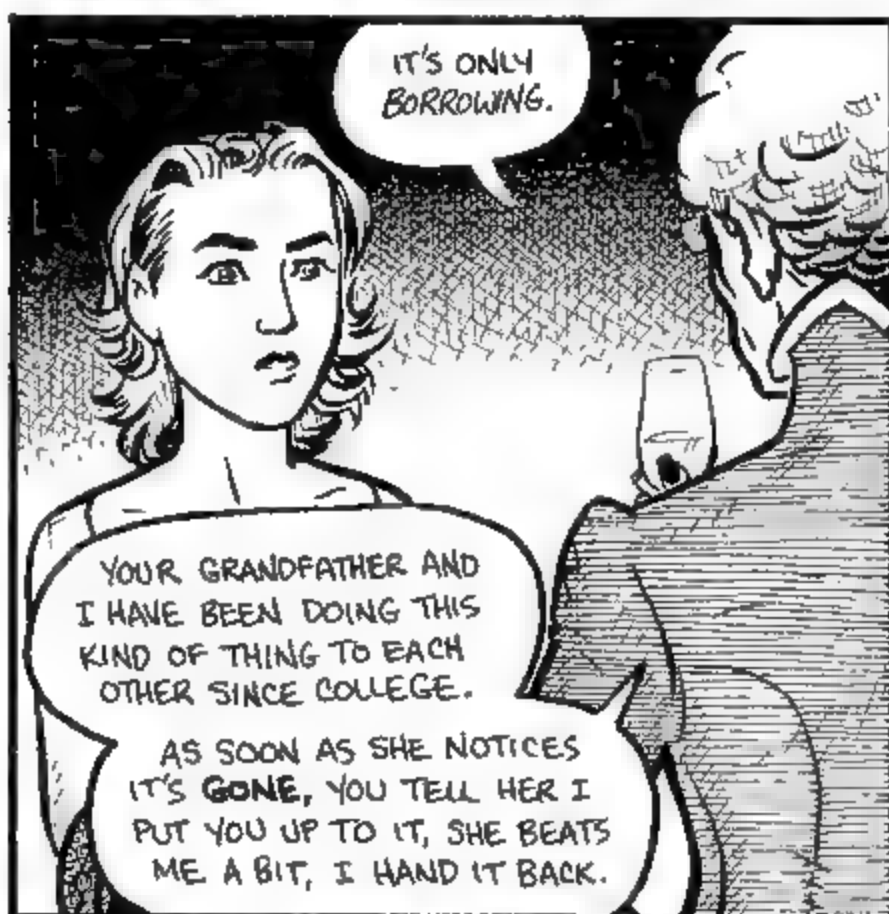


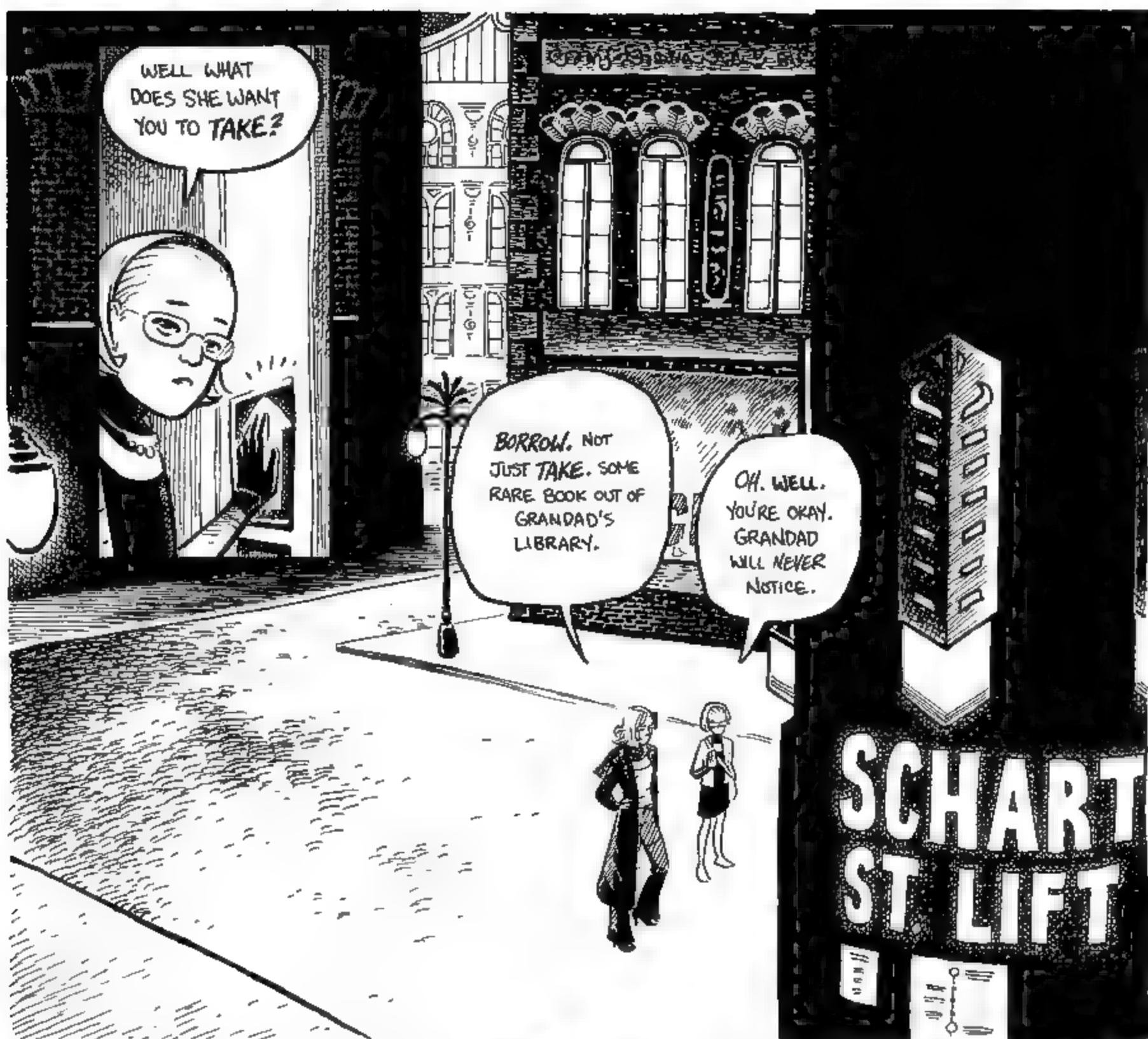


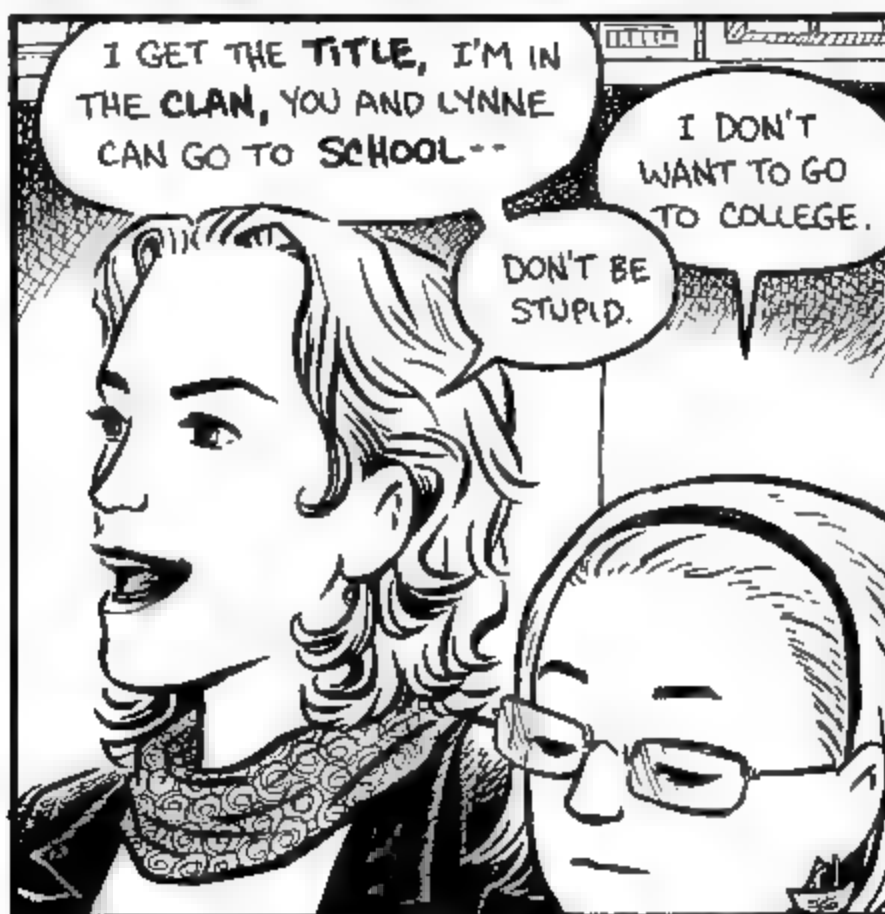


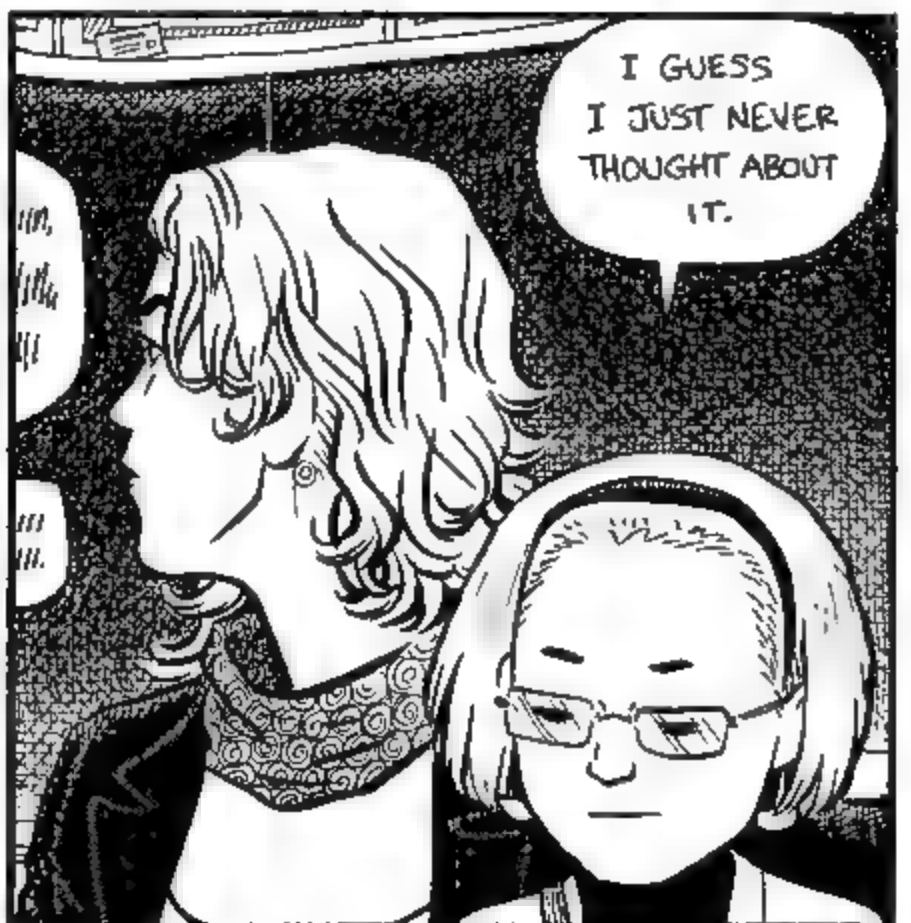
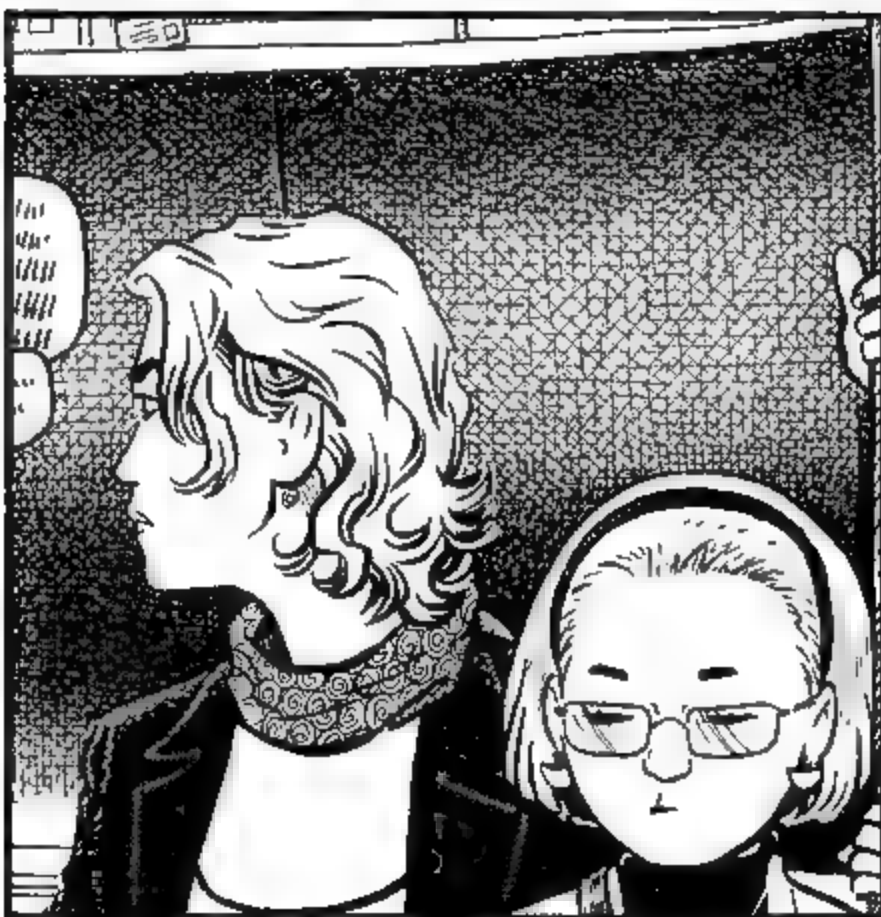


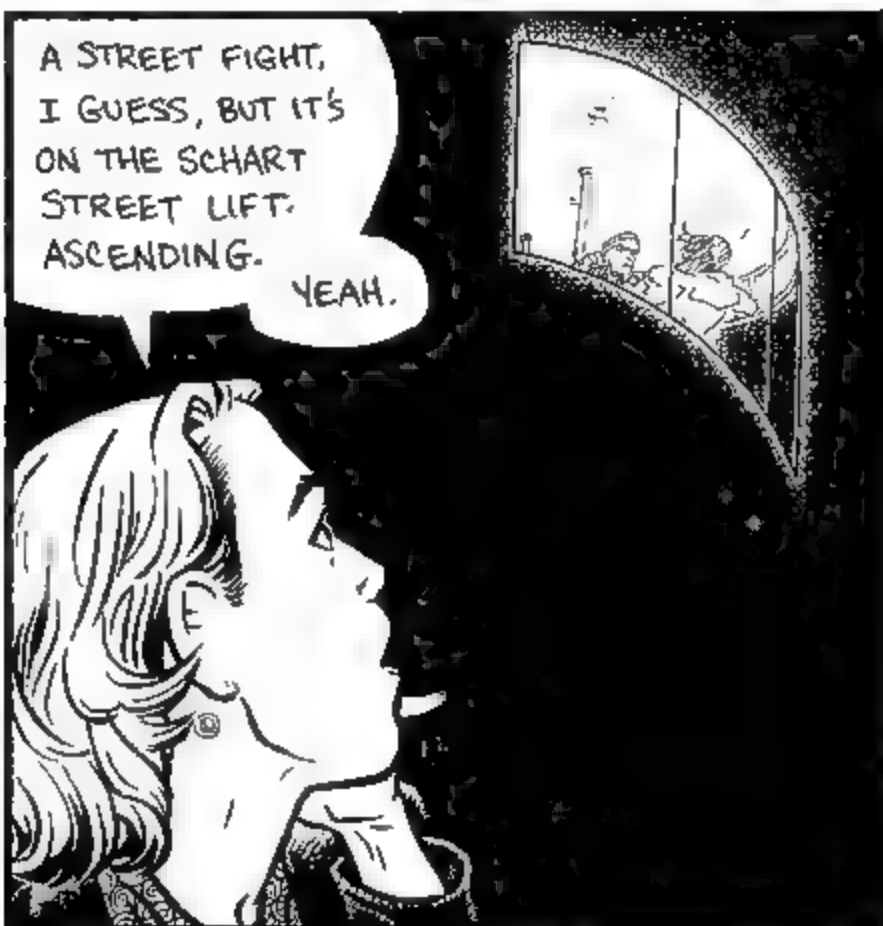






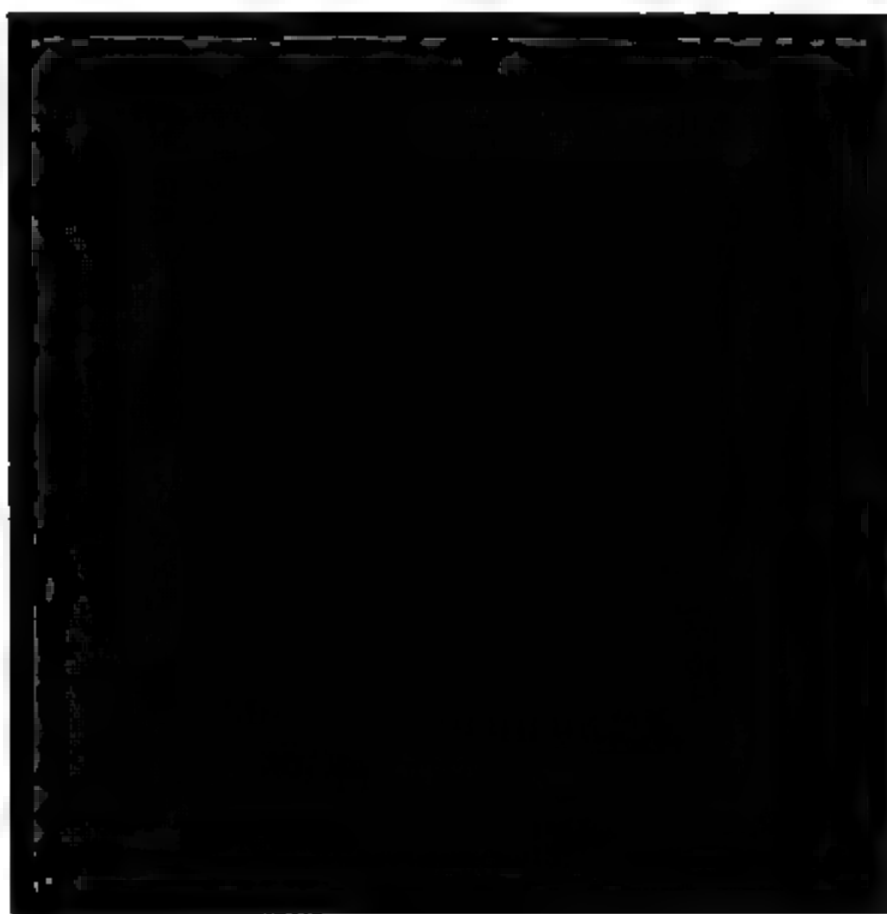
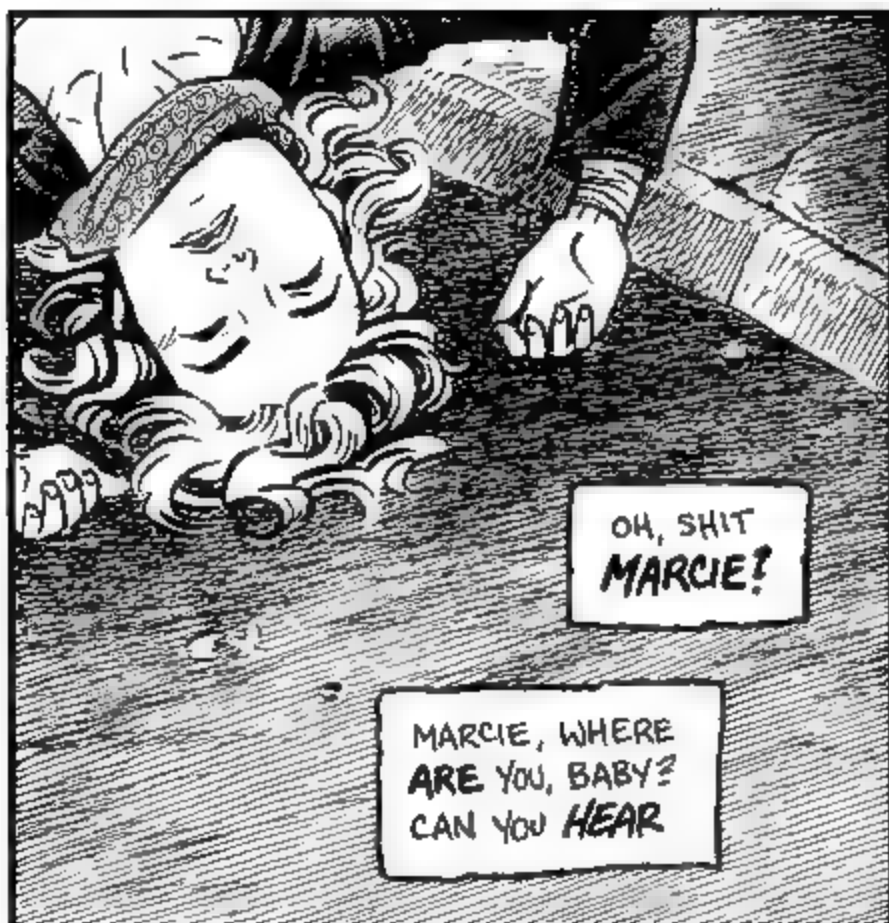


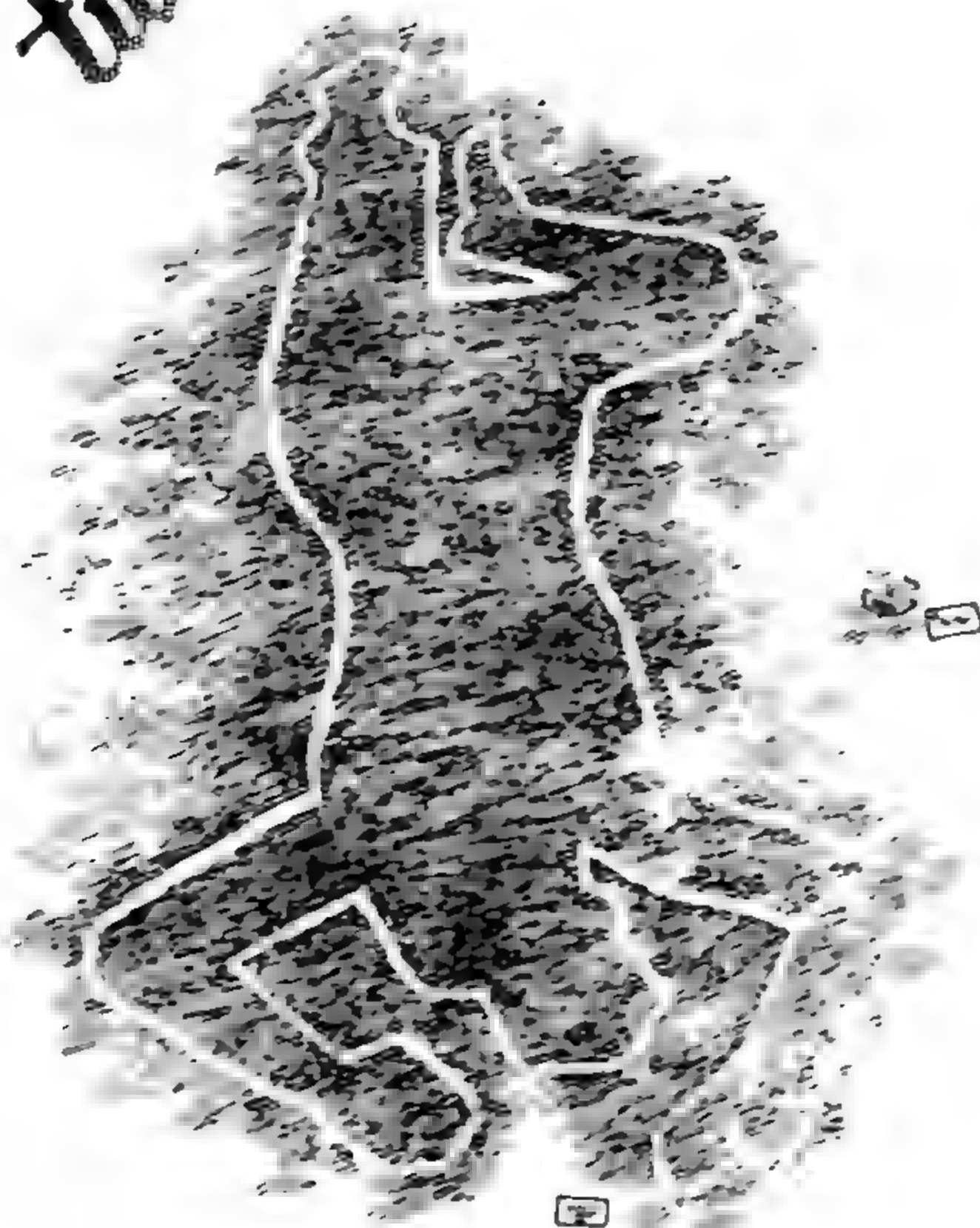


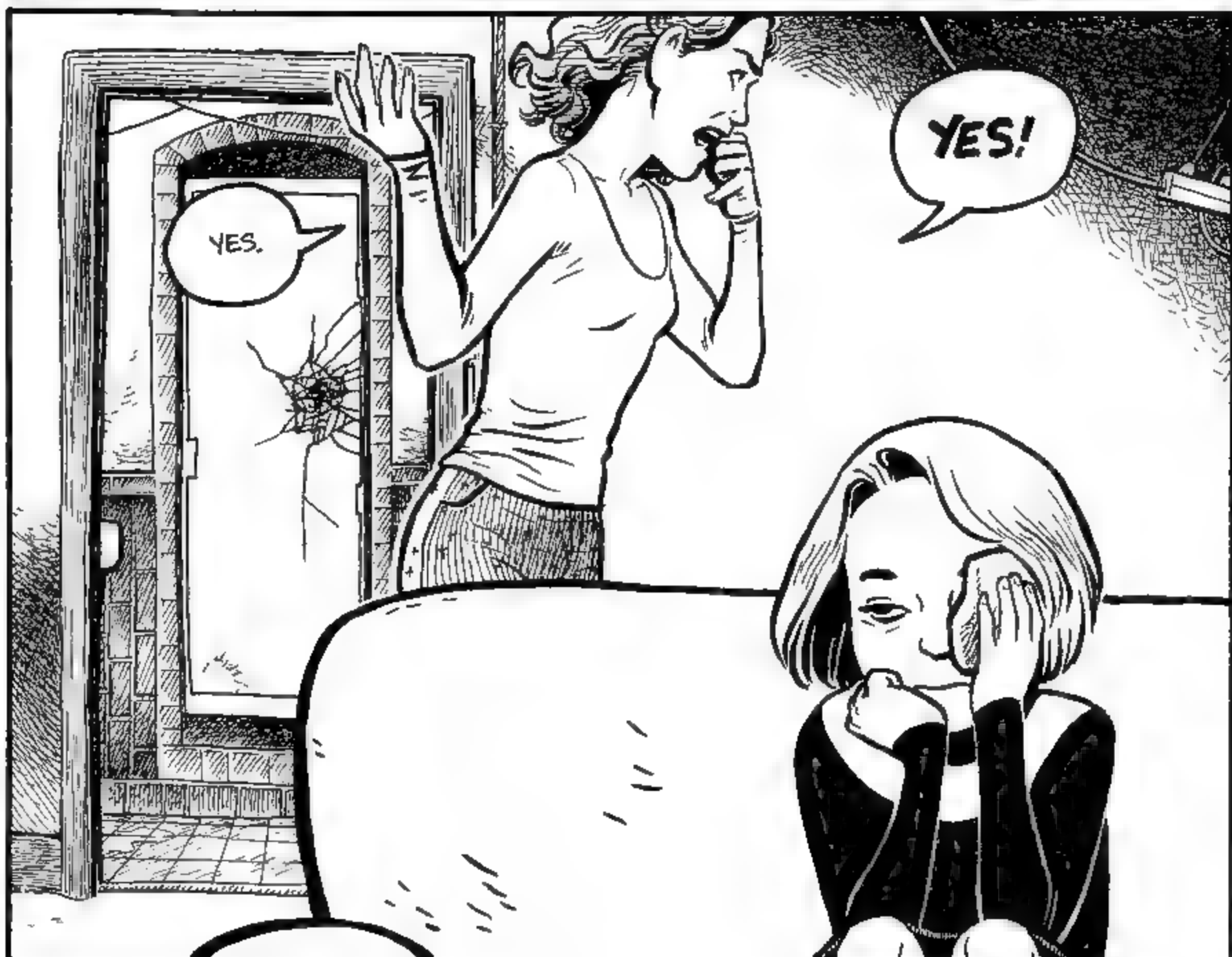


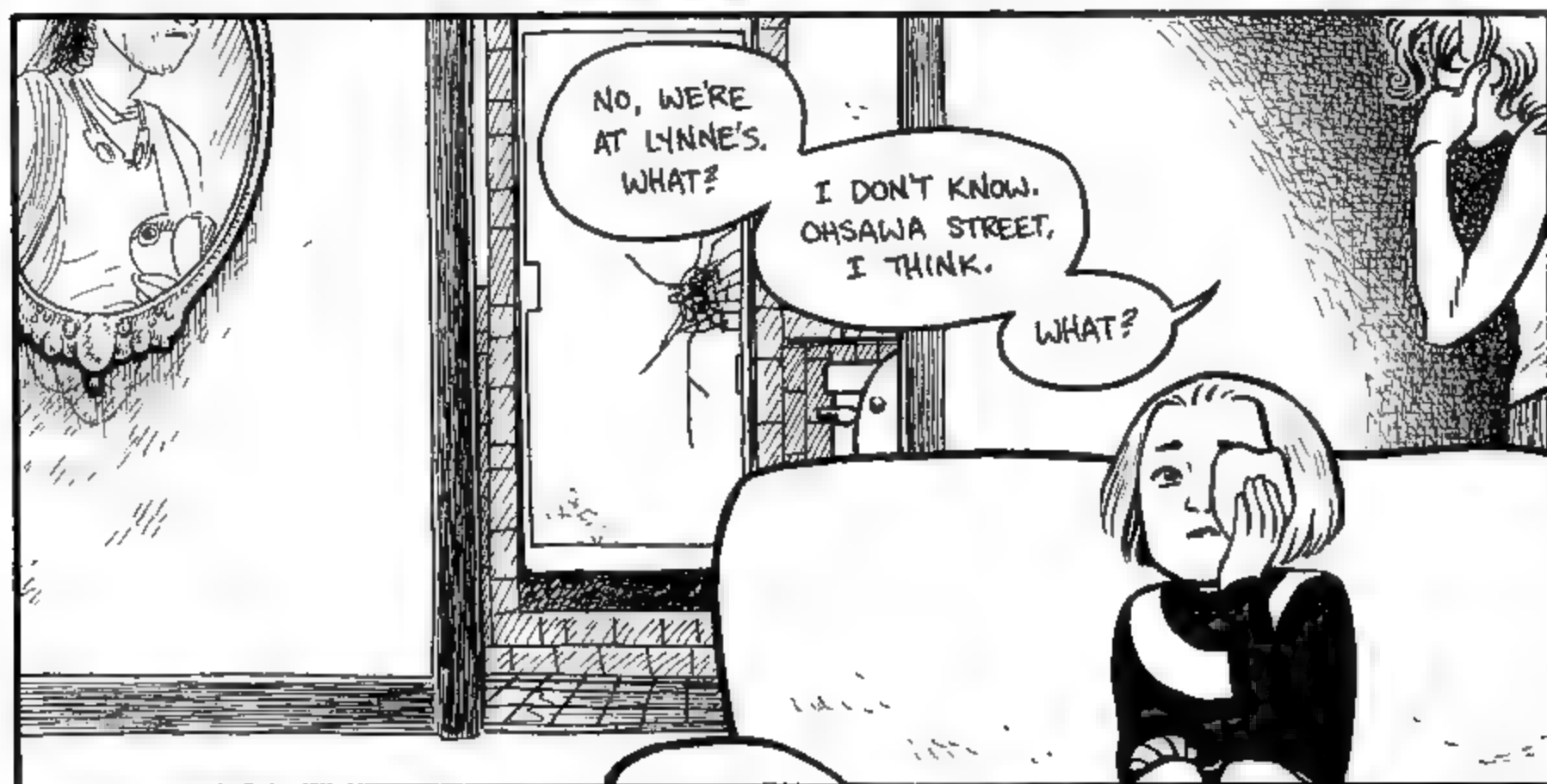


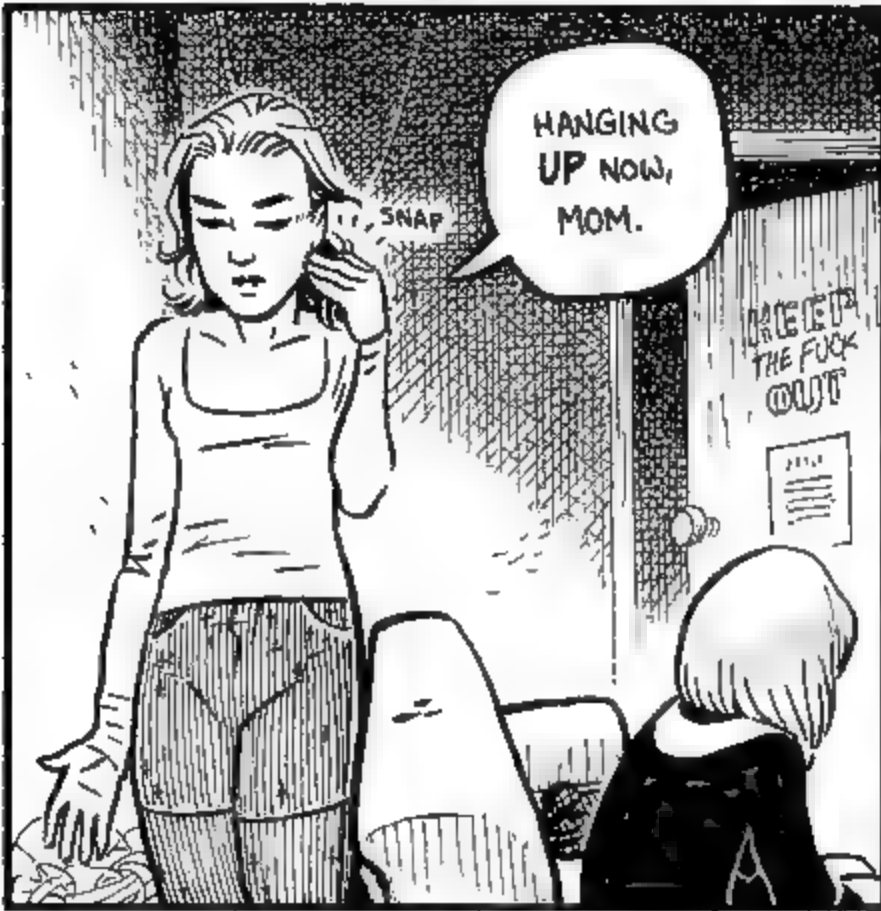












MARCIE PHONED OUR
SISTER. I COULDN'T
STOP HER. LYNNE WILL
GO OFF LIKE A BOMB.

HE'S AN INFO DEALER AND WILL JUST SELL
SOME VIDEOS OF SOME LORD'S WIFE TRYING
IN THINGS AT A SEX-TOY SHOP TO WHOMEVER
HAS FOOTAGE OF US GETTING MUGGED --
AND SOMEBODY WILL HAVE IT--

--AND FOOTAGE
OF WHERE THEY
WENT AND
WHERE THEY
ARE NOW AND,
WELL.

LYNNE WILL DO
SOMETHING REALLY
UGLY AND NOT GET
CAUGHT BECAUSE
HIS TRADE WILL
INCLUDE ANY FOOTAGE
OF HIM BEATING THE
SHIT OUT OF THE THIEF.

A GOOD INFO DEALER WEARS
THIS CITY LIKE A SUIT OF CLOTHES,
AND YOUR OWN CLOTHES HARDLY
EVER MAKE TROUBLE FOR YOU.

AND MARCIE WON'T LET
ME DO ANYTHING FOR HER.

BECAUSE THERE ISN'T A WHOLE
LOT I CAN REALLY DO.

**CLICK-
CLACK**









RIGHT THEN,
LOOKING GOOD--

LOOKING
GOOD--

DID YOU
EAT LAST
NIGHT?

GOOD!

NO.



DON'T OVERDO
THE EXERCISE, RAE
GIRL. MUSCLE BULGES
JUST LIKE FAT.
THINK **BONE**, GIRL,
SEXY BONE.



AAAND - **THERE**.
TRUTHFULLY, LOVE,
YOU'RE AS PERFECT AS
I WAS WHEN I COMPETED,
AND, BETWEEN US, **THAT** IS
SAYING SOMETHING. HAVE
A DRINK FOR YOUR THROAT,
AND DO GET YOUR
RING ON.




OH, WELL...
ABOUT THAT...
I KINDA
LOST IT...




YOU KINDA
WHAT
IT, DARLING?



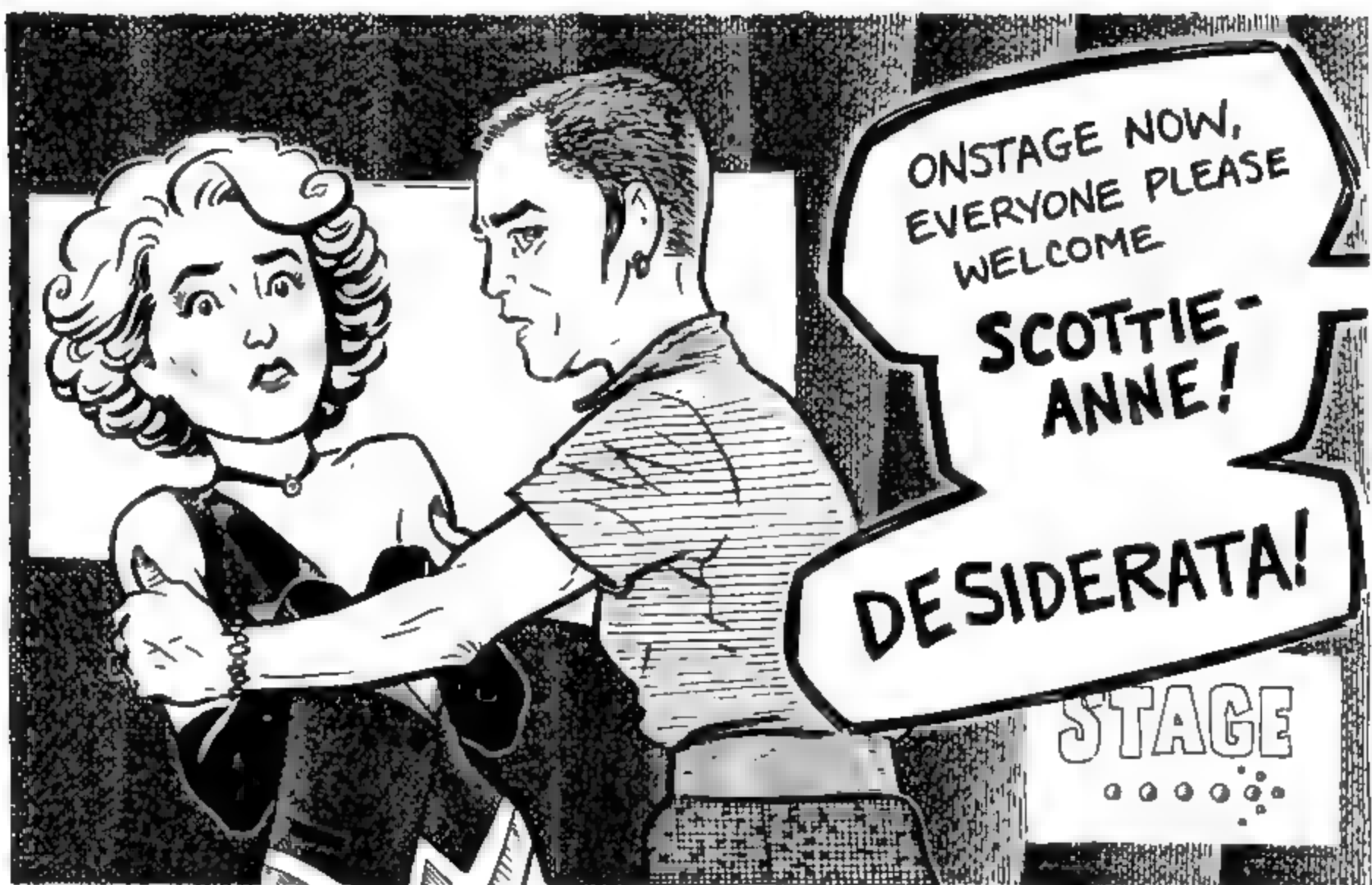


THEY'RE AWARDING
KNIGHTHOODS,
RACHEL. IF YOU
WIN YOU'RE **IN!**

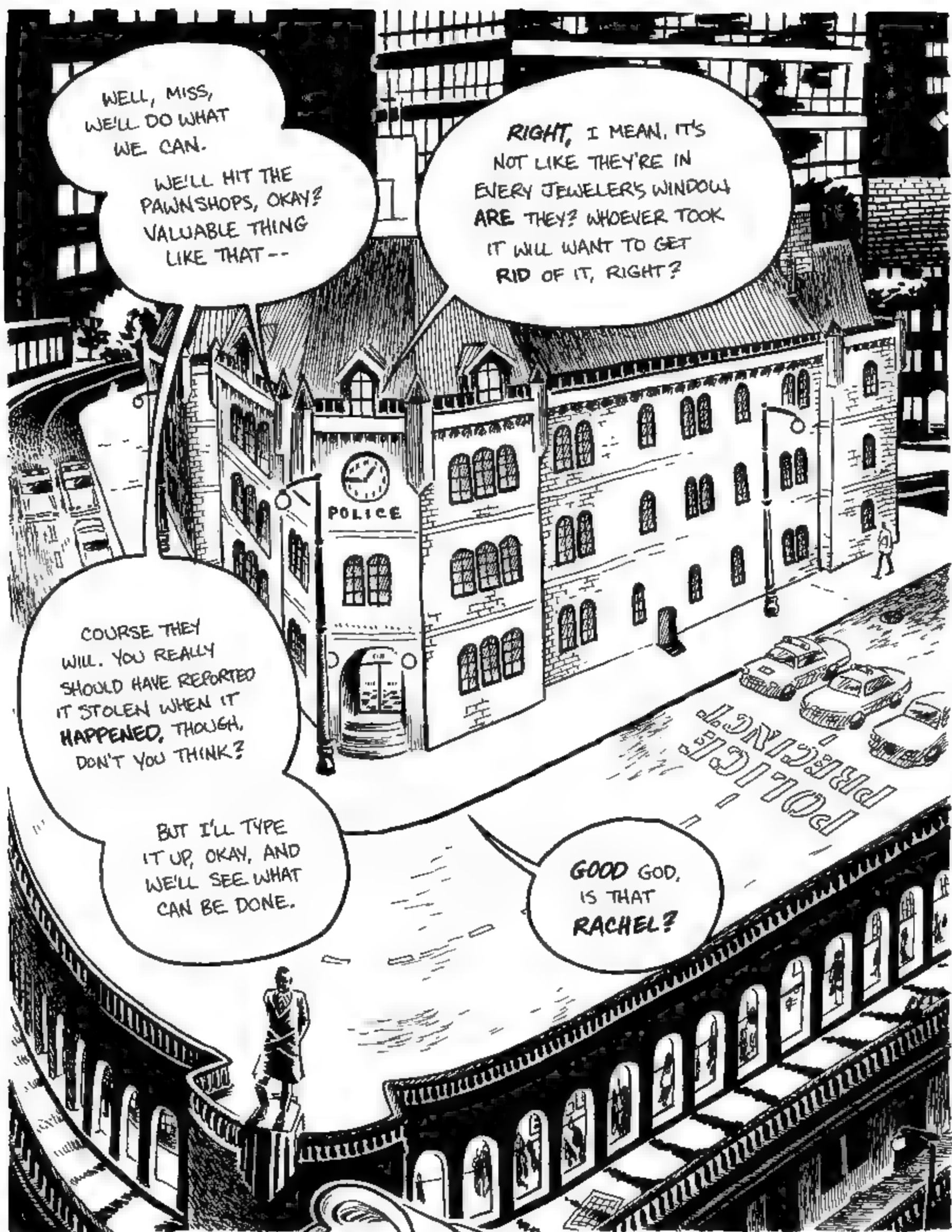
YOU **HAVE** TO **HAVE**
YOUR FAMILY'S RING
ON YOUR HAND
WHEN YOU STAND UP
IN FRONT OF THE
QUEEN MUM!



YOU THINK **SHE'S** GONNA
PAT YOU ON YOUR PRETTY
HEAD AND SAY, "NEVER MIND,
HONEY, ~~ANY~~ OLD RING OUT OF
A PIG'S NOSE OR A HIPSTER'S
LIP WILL SATISFY **SIX**
HUNDRED YEARS
OF
TRADITION"?







WELL, MISS,
WE'LL DO WHAT
WE CAN.

WE'LL HIT THE
PAWNSHOPS, OKAY?
VALUABLE THING
LIKE THAT --

RIGHT, I MEAN, IT'S
NOT LIKE THEY'RE IN
EVERY JEWELER'S WINDOW
ARE THEY? WHOEVER TOOK
IT WILL WANT TO GET
RID OF IT, RIGHT?

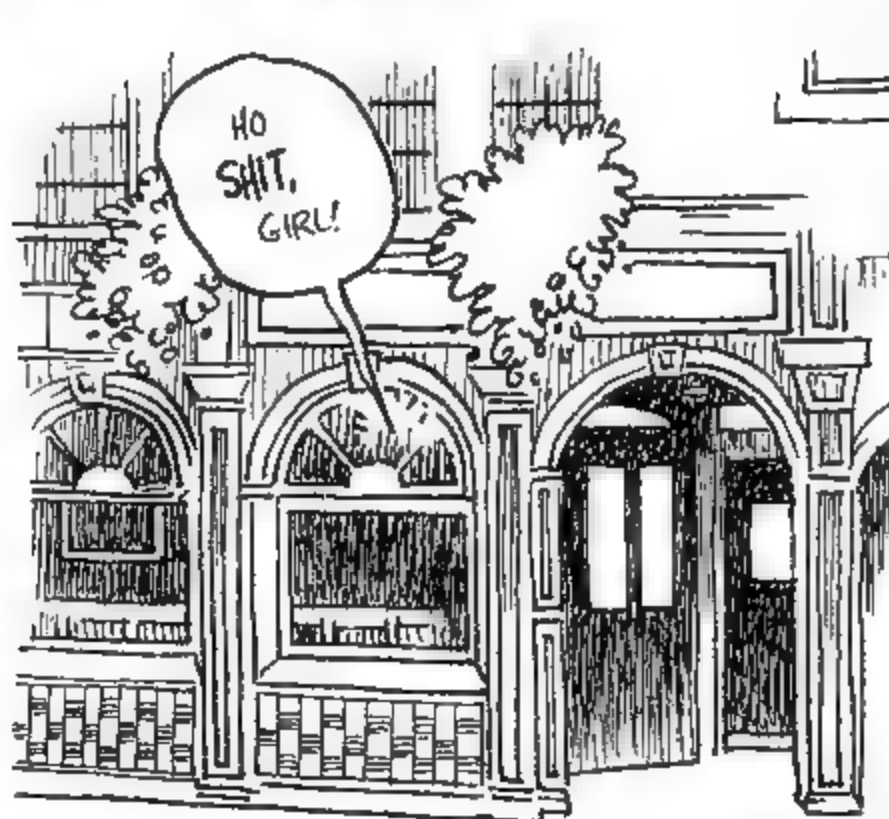
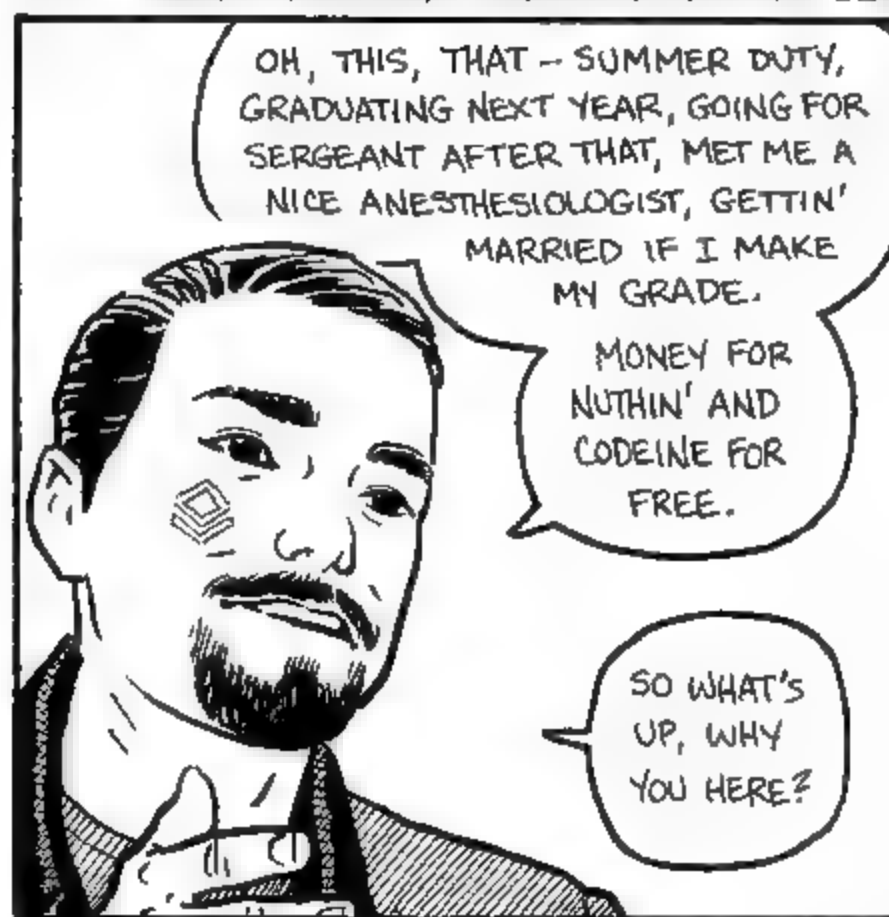
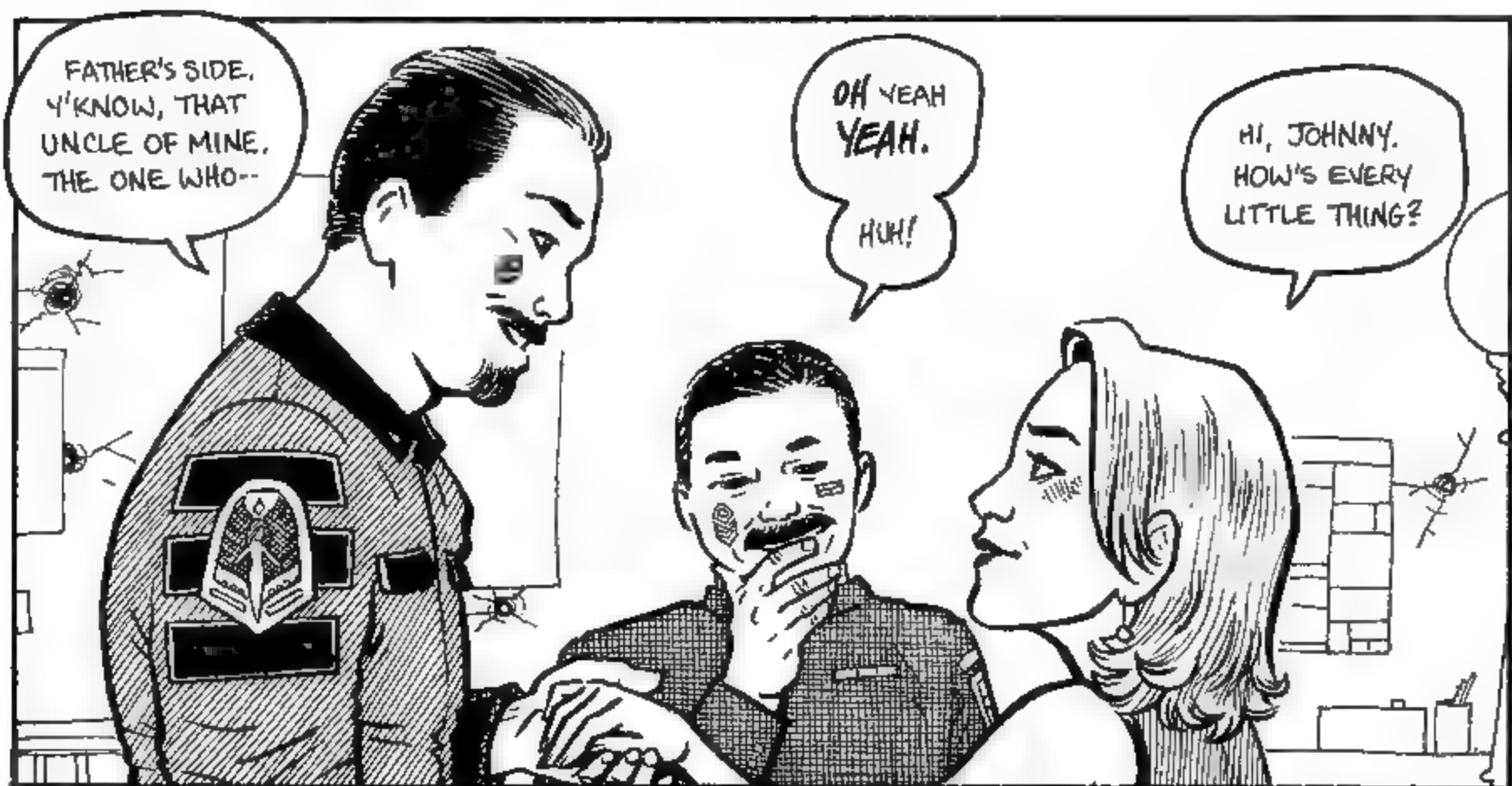
COURSE THEY
WILL. YOU REALLY
SHOULD HAVE REPORTED
IT STOLEN WHEN IT
HAPPENED, THOUGH,
DON'T YOU THINK?

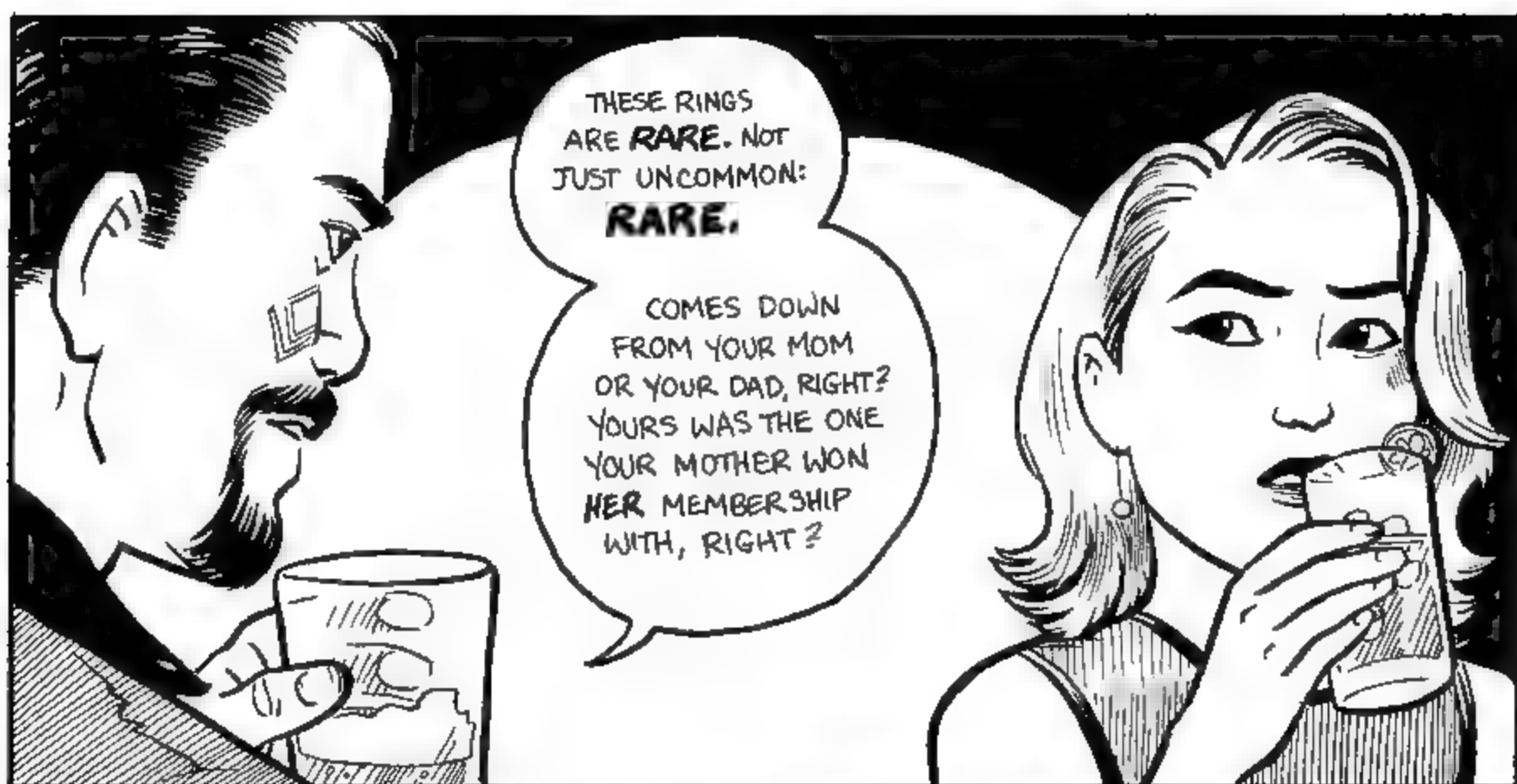
BUT I'LL TYPE
IT UP, OKAY, AND
WE'LL SEE WHAT
CAN BE DONE.

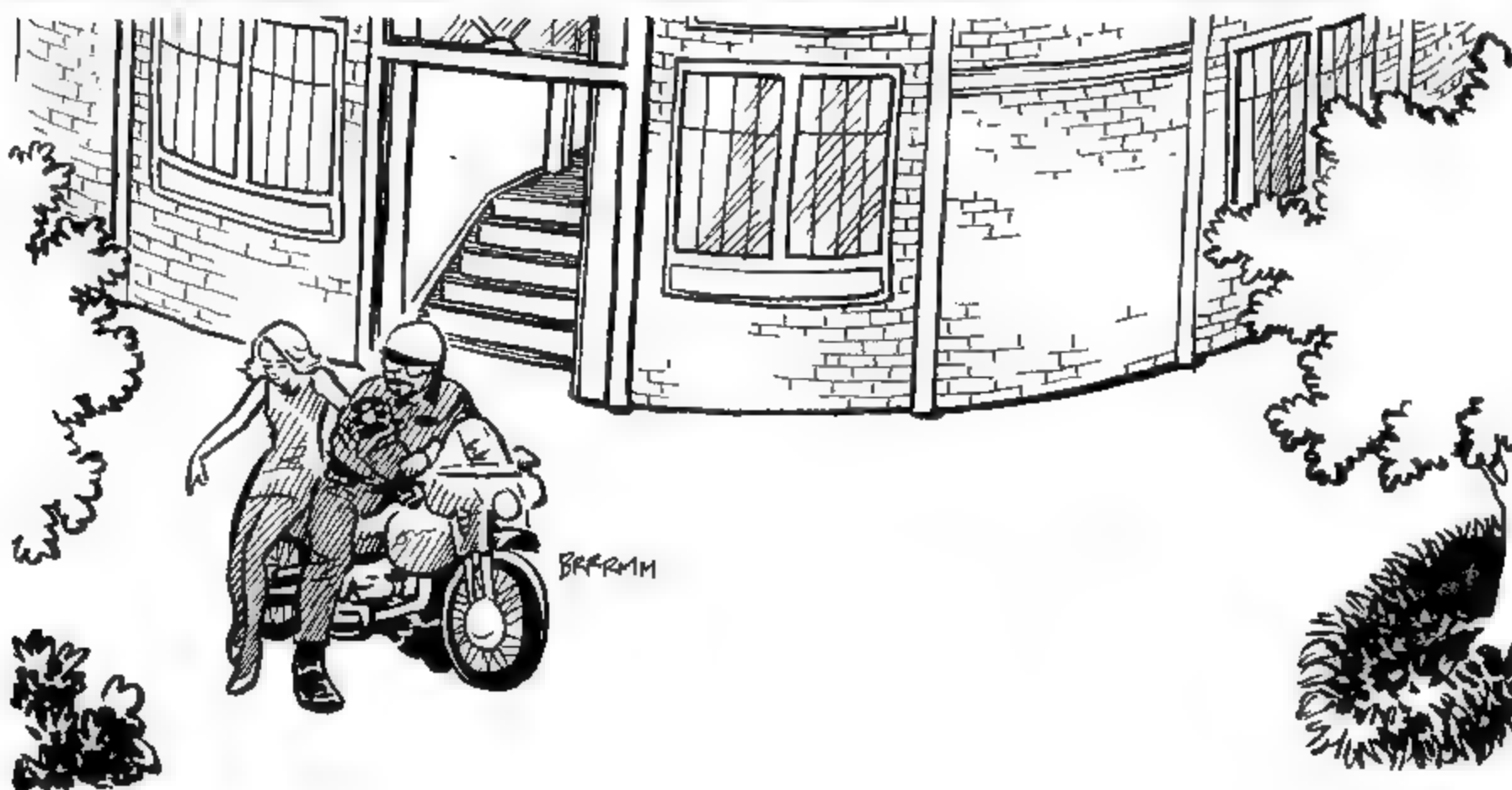
GOOD GOD,
IS THAT
RACHEL?

IT'S OKAY,
RUSS, SHE'S
MY COUSIN.

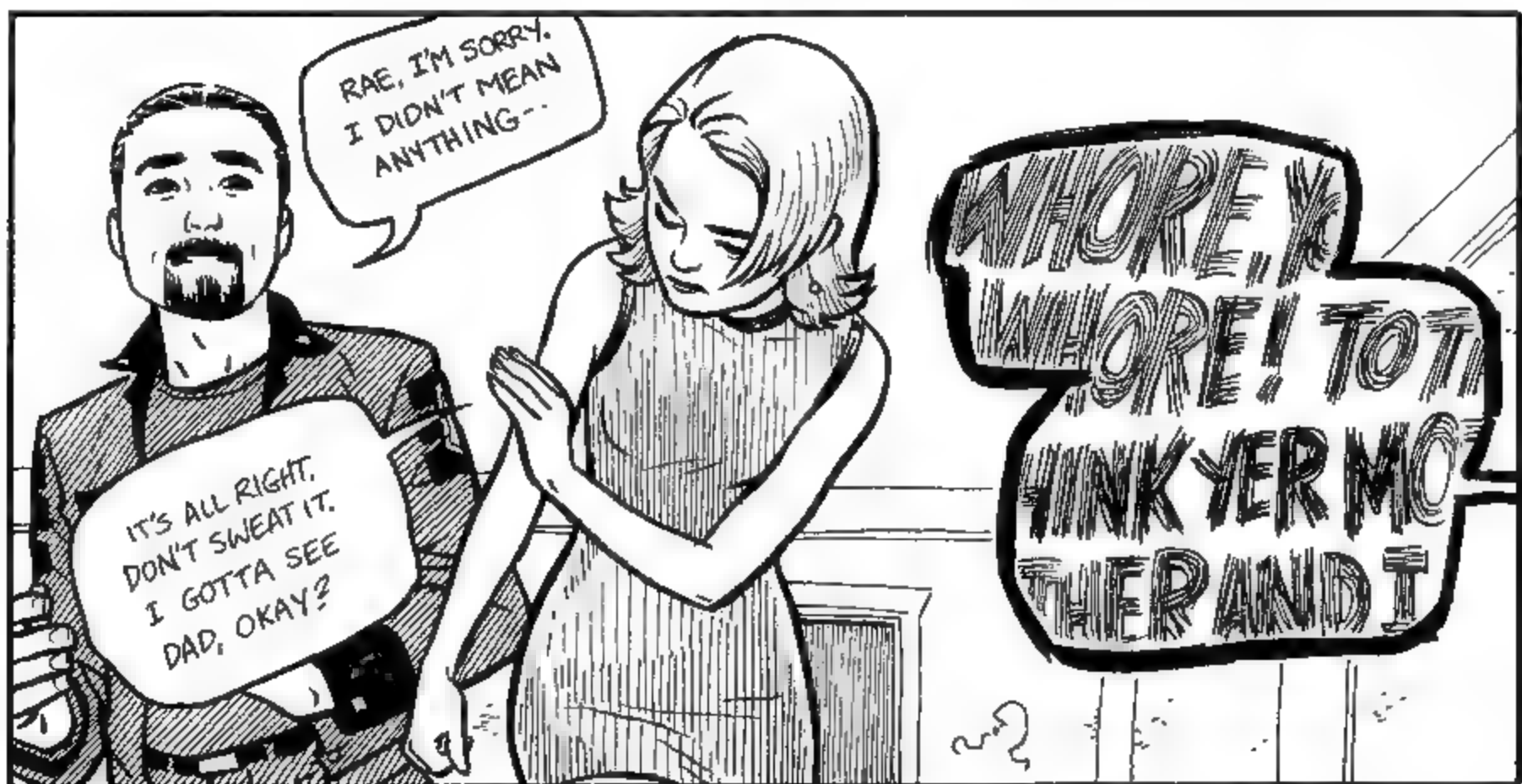
SHE
WHAT?

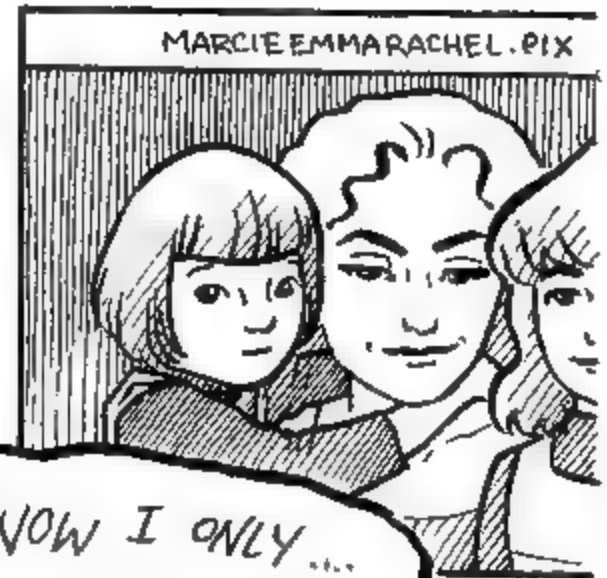






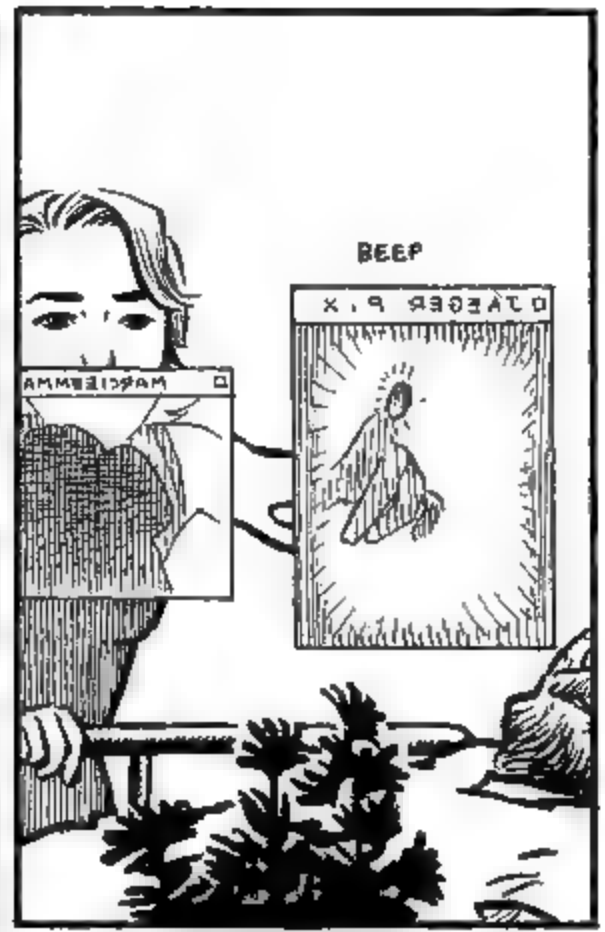




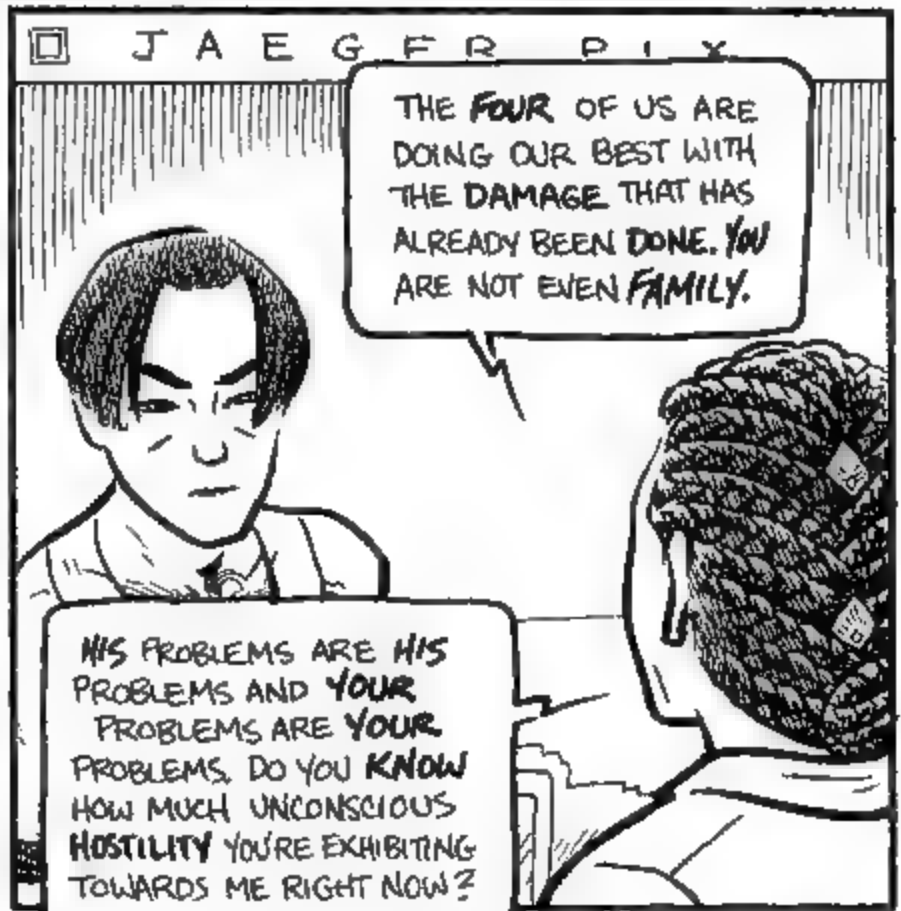


YOU KNOW I ONLY...
LOVED YOU GUYS... HOW
COULD YOU DO ME TH...



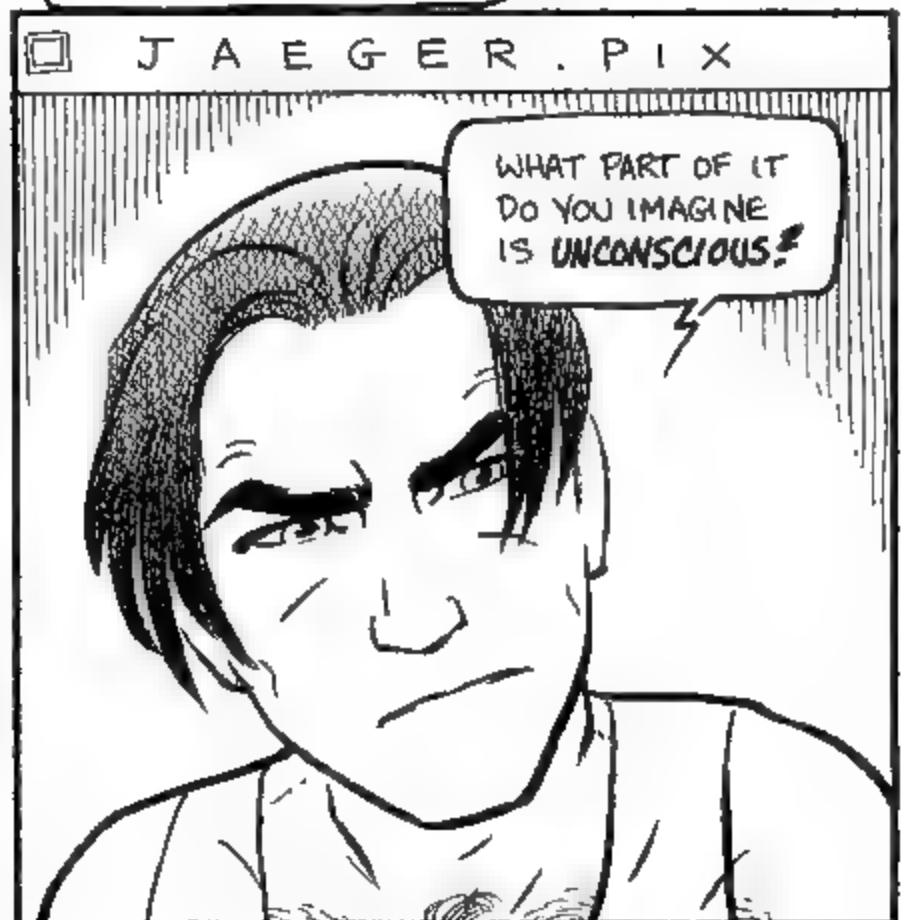
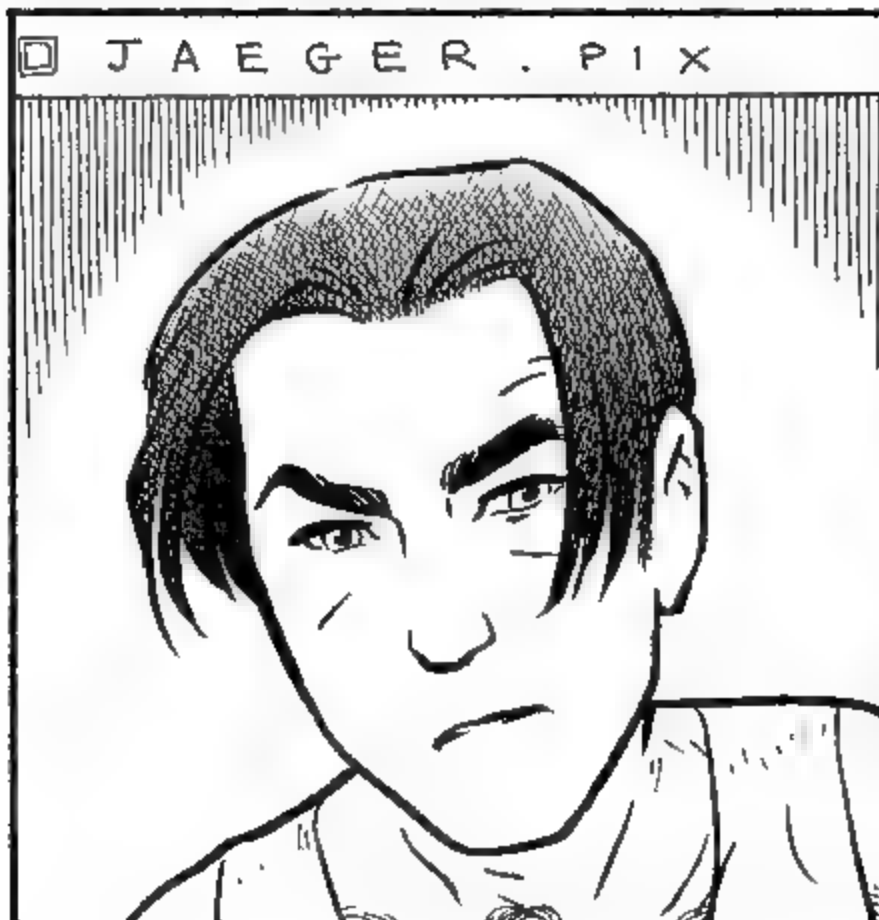


LOOK-- HE'S GOT **FOUR** SPECIALISTS-- I JUST WANT TO KNOW IF THE **FOUR** OF YOU ARE ACTUALLY **TALKING** TO EACH OTHER. HE'S ON A **LOT** OF DRUGS--



THE **FOUR** OF US ARE DOING OUR BEST WITH THE **DAMAGE** THAT HAS ALREADY BEEN DONE. **YOU** ARE NOT EVEN **FAMILY**.

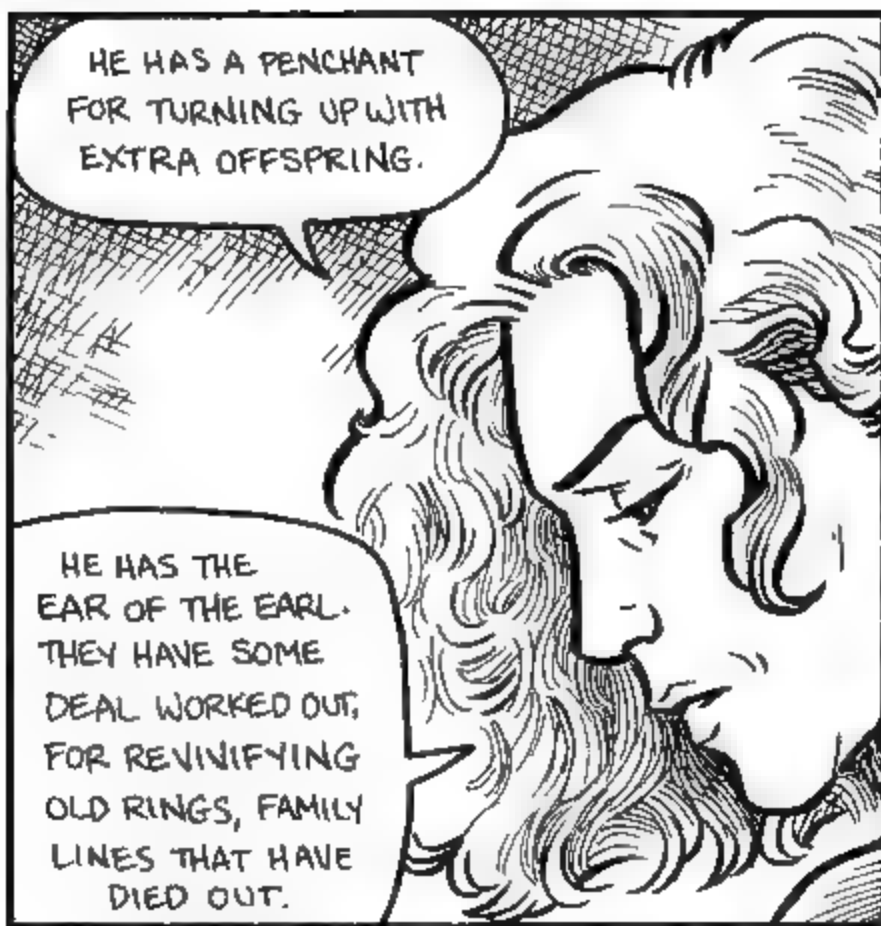
HIS PROBLEMS ARE **HIS** PROBLEMS AND **YOUR** PROBLEMS ARE **YOUR** PROBLEMS. DO YOU **KNOW** HOW MUCH UNCONSCIOUS **HOSTILITY** YOU'RE EXHIBITING TOWARDS ME RIGHT NOW?



WHAT PART OF IT DO YOU IMAGINE IS **UNCONSCIOUS**?



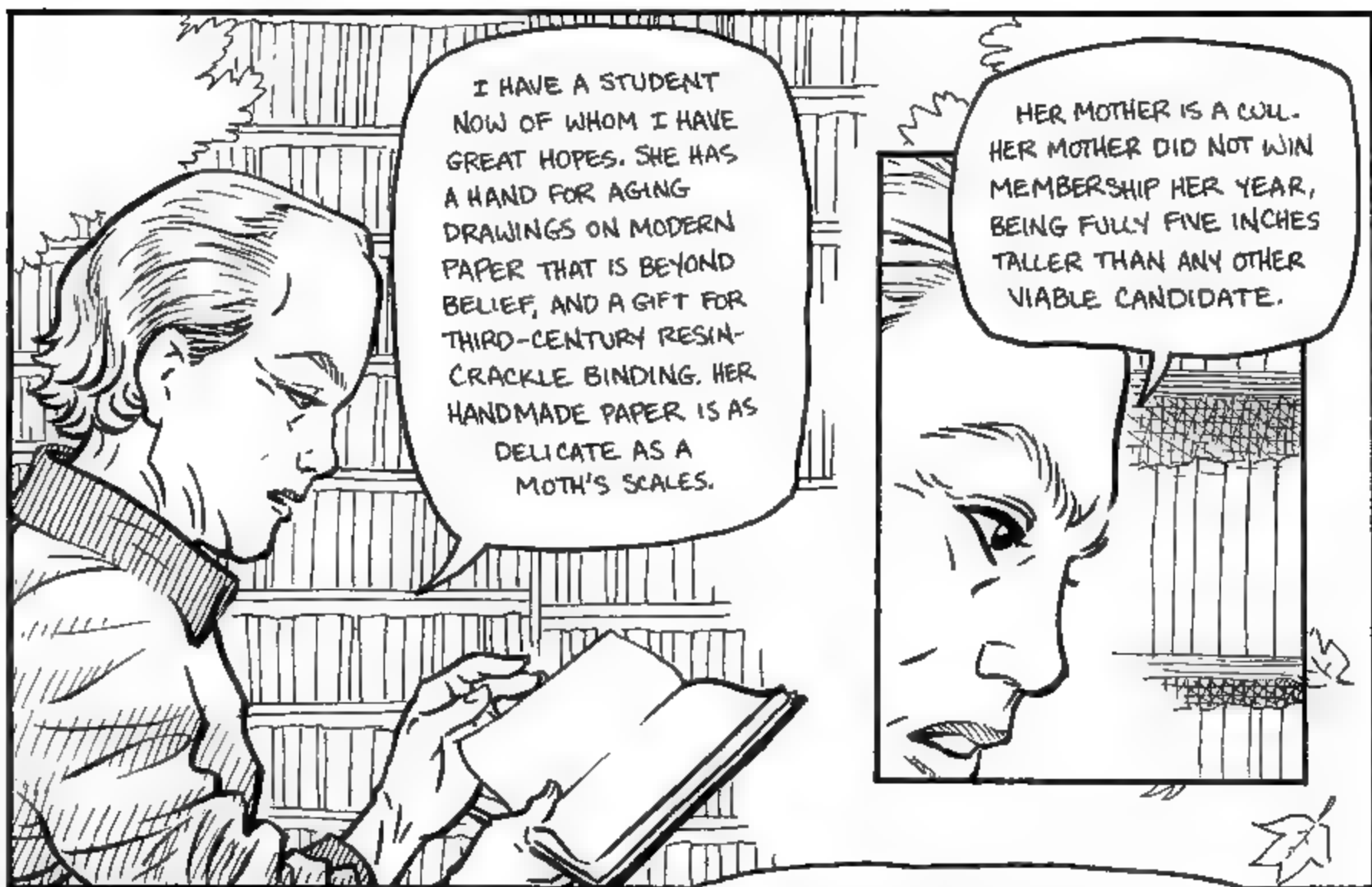












I HAVE A STUDENT NOW OF WHOM I HAVE GREAT HOPES. SHE HAS A HAND FOR AGING DRAWINGS ON MODERN PAPER THAT IS BEYOND BELIEF, AND A GIFT FOR THIRD-CENTURY RESIN-CRACKLE BINDING. HER HANDMADE PAPER IS AS DELICATE AS A MOTH'S SCALES.

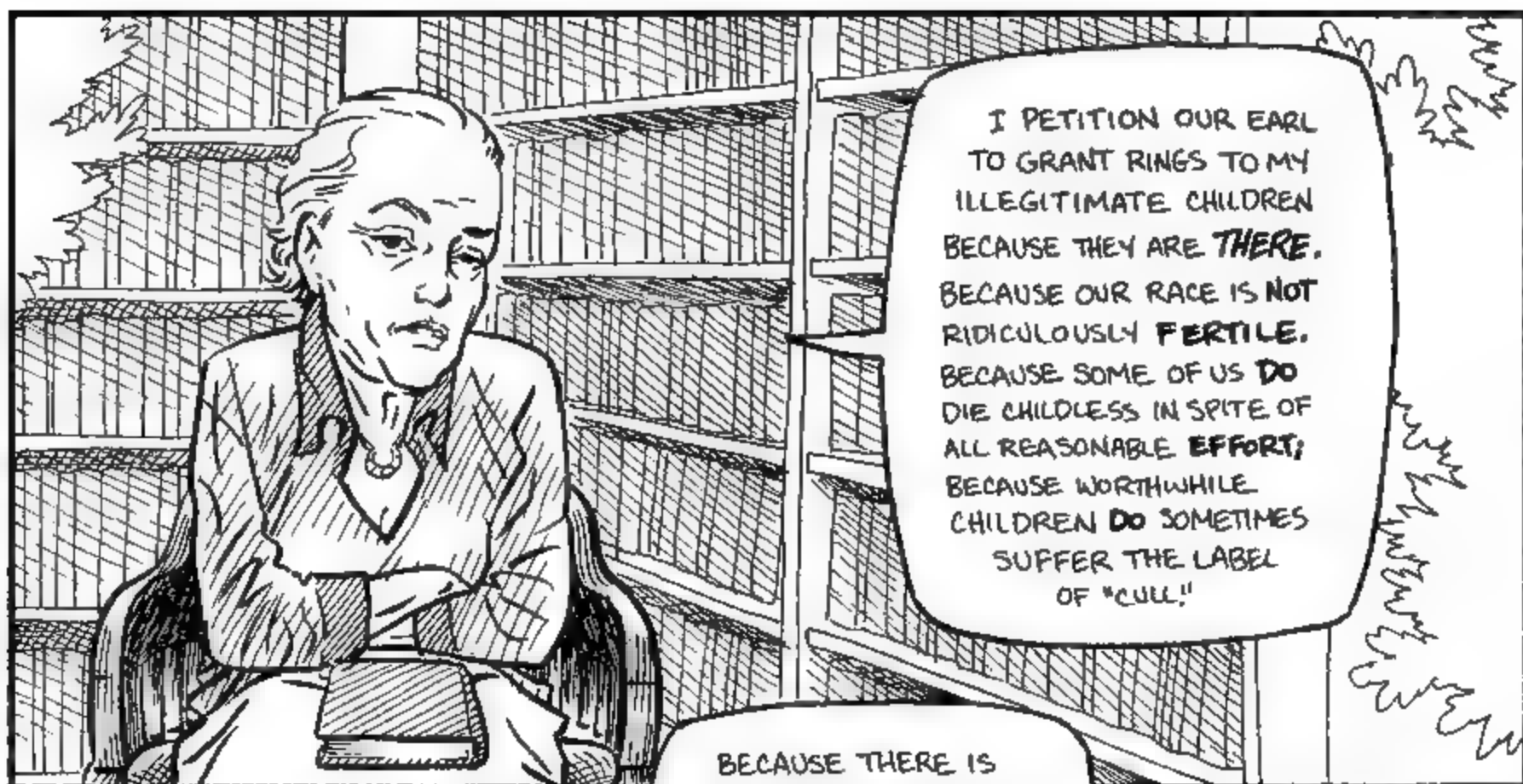
HER MOTHER IS A COLL. HER MOTHER DID NOT WIN MEMBERSHIP HER YEAR, BEING FULLY FIVE INCHES TALLER THAN ANY OTHER VIABLE CANDIDATE.



THE FOLLOWING YEAR THERE WERE SEVEN CANDIDATES HER HEIGHT, AND THE HEIGHT REQUIREMENT WAS IGNORED AND LATER ADJUSTED. IF ONLY SHE HADN'T BEEN A WINTER BABY... I MADE A CHILD WITH HER SO THAT SHE MIGHT HAVE SOME CHANCE AT SECURITY IN HER LIFE. ONLY LUCK LENT THAT CHILD SUCH GIFTS AT BOOKCRAFTING.

I WILL PETITION THE EARL, WHEN SHE IS OF AGE, FOR A RING, WITH WHICH SHE WILL ATTEMPT TO WIN A PLACE FOR HERSELF IN OUR CLAN.

HER PEDIGREE IS IMPECCABLE.



I PETITION OUR EARL
TO GRANT RINGS TO MY
ILLEGITIMATE CHILDREN
BECAUSE THEY ARE **THERE**.
BECAUSE OUR RACE IS NOT
RIDICULOUSLY **FERTILE**.
BECAUSE SOME OF US **DO**
DIE CHILDLESS IN SPITE OF
ALL REASONABLE **EFFORT**;
BECAUSE WORTHWHILE
CHILDREN **DO** SOMETIMES
SUFFER THE LABEL
OF "CULL!"



BECAUSE THERE IS
MORE TO CONFORMATION
TO CLAN IDEALS THAN
WHAT COMES OUT OF
A MAKEUP KIT.

YOU **WERE** A LINK IN A
CHAIN. YOU **HAD** A RING.
YOUR TALE OF STUPIDITY
AND NEGLIGENCE HAS **NOT**
TOUCHED MY HEART. YOU
HAD A CHANCE AND NOW
IT IS GONE.

YOU GO
WITH IT.

GOOD **DAY**,
MISS
GROSVENOR.



...YEAH,
SAID NO.

I THINK WHAT
HE HAD TO SAY
DEFINITELY BOILS
DOWN TO "NO."



AND YOU'RE
TELLING ME
ALL THIS
BECAUSE...?

BECAUSE,
LYNNE, YOU'RE
MY SISTER AND I
WANT YOU TO HELP
ME! YOU COULD FIND
THAT THING IF YOU
WANTED TO!



YOU'RE NO SISTER
OF MINE, JUST A HALF,
AND NOT THE GOOD
HALF AT THAT.

I HELP MY
SISTER. YOU
CAN LOOK AFTER
YOURSELF,
MISS POLLY
PUREBRED.



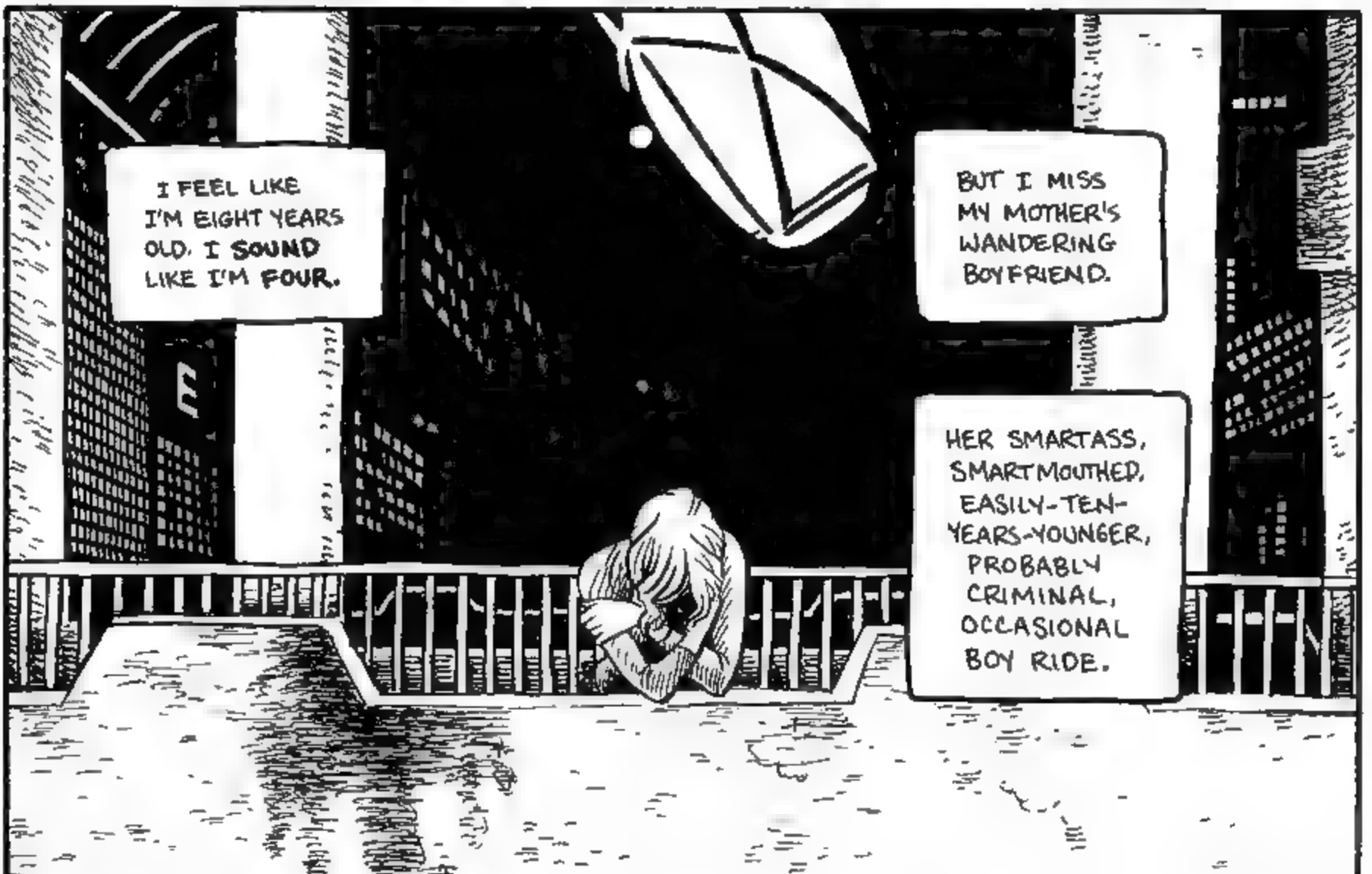
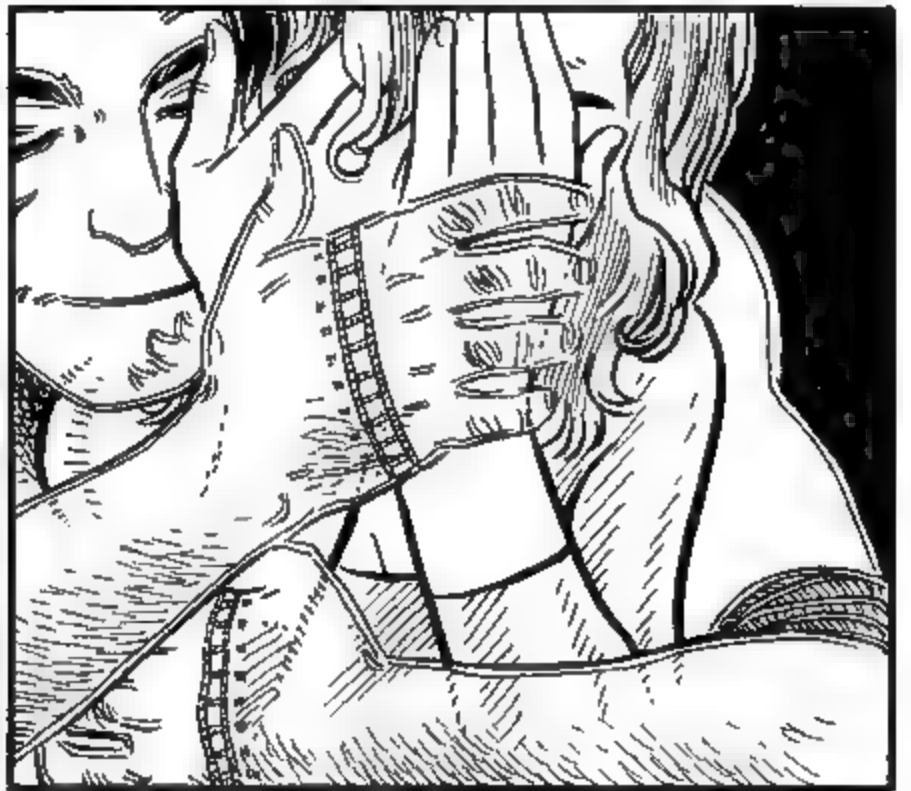
THAT'S A FINE THING
TO SAY, YOU DICK! I'M
TRYING TO HELP ALL OF
US! YOU CAN'T

IF YOU'RE GOING
TO BE ABUSIVE,
YOU CAN GO.

YOU MADE UP
YOUR MIND NOT TO
HELP ME BEFORE
YOU EVEN HEARD
WHAT I HAD TO SAY--







I FEEL LIKE
I'M EIGHT YEARS
OLD. I SOUND
LIKE I'M FOUR.

BUT I MISS
MY MOTHER'S
WANDERING
BOYFRIEND.

HER SMARTASS,
SMARTMOUTHED,
EASILY-TEN-
YEARS-YOUNGER,
PROBABLY
CRIMINAL,
OCCASIONAL
BOY RIDE.



WHERE THE HELL
HAVE YOU **BEEEN?**

WHY HAVEN'T YOU
BEEN **BACK?**

IF ONLY YOU'D

TURN UP **NOW--**



I
THINK
I

KNOW
WHERE
TO START
LOOKING

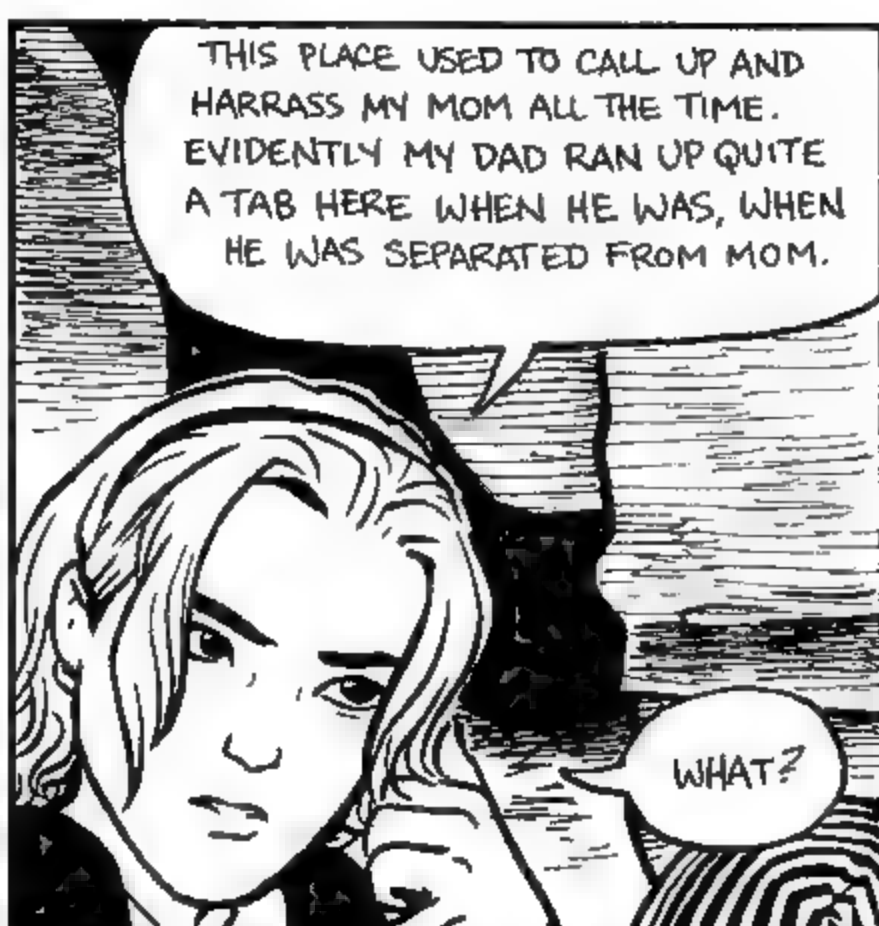


three:





I'M AT THIS SCUNGY
OLD-GUY PUB CALLED --
-- WHAT?



THIS PLACE USED TO CALL UP AND
HARRASS MY MOM ALL THE TIME.
EVIDENTLY MY DAD RAN UP QUITE
A TAB HERE WHEN HE WAS, WHEN
HE WAS SEPARATED FROM MOM.

WHAT?



NO, I DON'T KNOW
IF JAEGER HUNG
OUT HERE YET.

BECAUSE
I HAVEN'T
ASKED.

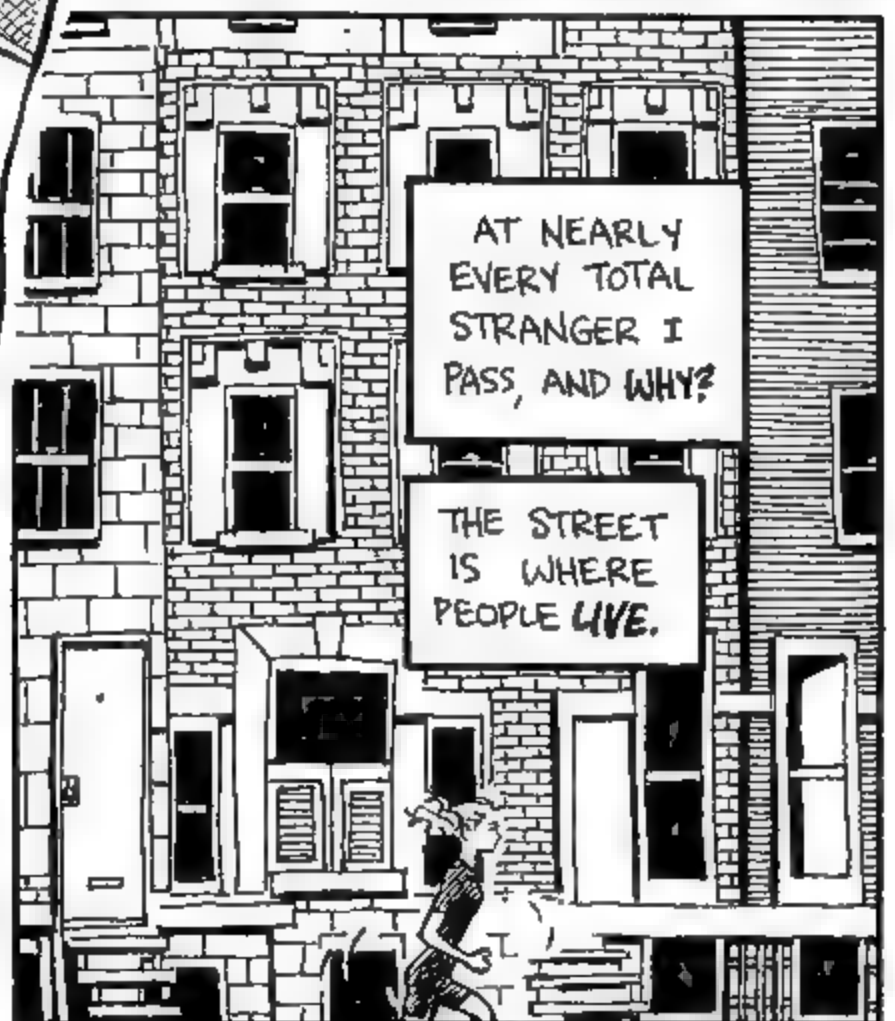


I JUST -- IT'S NOISY, IT'S HOT, IT'S
SMOKY, AND I DON'T KNOW ANYBODY.
I MEAN, THERE'S THE BARTENDER, BUT
HE'S JUST SO BUSY... I CAN'T...



THERE'S JUST SO
MUCH GOING ON
IN HERE...





AND... THERE'S
THIS KID.

OH, THREE YEARS
OLD. *MAYBE* FOUR
GOD, WHAT A **BRAT!**

I'D COME DOWN THE LONG SIDE
OF MY BLOCK AND THERE HE'D
BE, ALWAYS OUT ON HIS HORRIBLE
LITTLE BIKE THING.

AND HE'D
SEE ME.


AND HE'D
AIM FOR ME.

IF I SHIFTED OVER TO PASS ON HIS
RIGHT, HE'D MOVE OVER TO THAT
SIDE. IF I SHIFTED OVER TO HIS **LEFT**,
THE LITTLE SHIT'D MOVE OVER **AGAIN**.

AND **GRIN**
AT ME!

AND THERE'S
HIS **MOTHER!**

FIVE FEET AWAY,
LETTING HER KID
PLAY **CHICKEN**
WITH ME!



SO THERE I WAS
AGAIN -- SAME
OLD SHIT --

I'M TOO STUBBORN
TO CHANGE MY
ROUTE I MEAN
HE'S JUST A **KID!**

AND THERE HE **IS**, DYING TO
BANG ME IN THE SHINS WITH
HIS EVIL LITTLE TRICYCLE
TIRE LIKE HE'S DONE EVERY
TIME HE **COULD**, AND I CAN
NOT WIN.

I CAN NOT WIN.

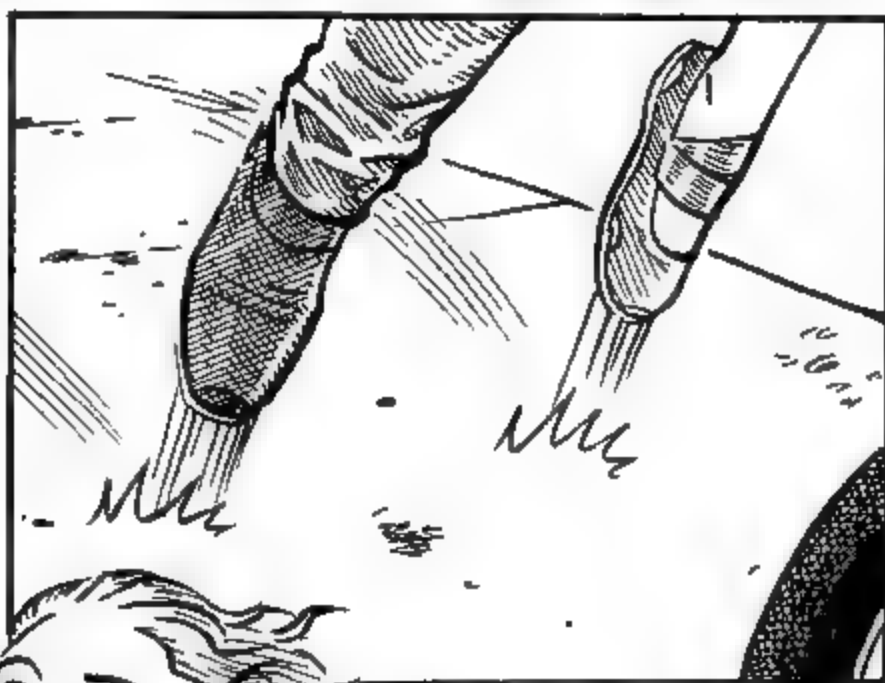
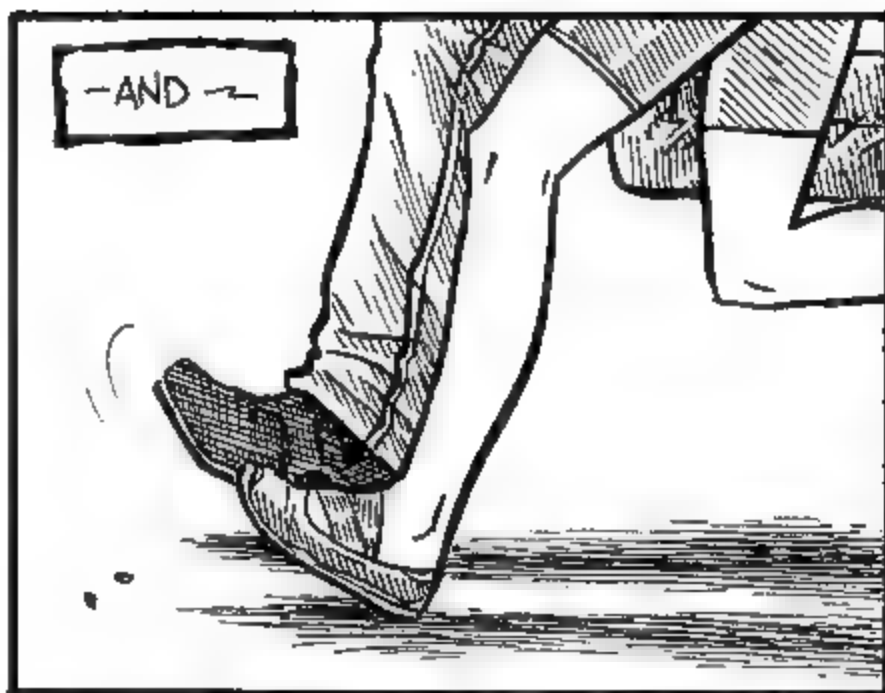
IT WAS THE PUREST
CONFRONTATION I'D
EVER FACED. NO WAY
TO POLITE MY WAY
OUT OF IT OR
SMOOTH IT OVER.

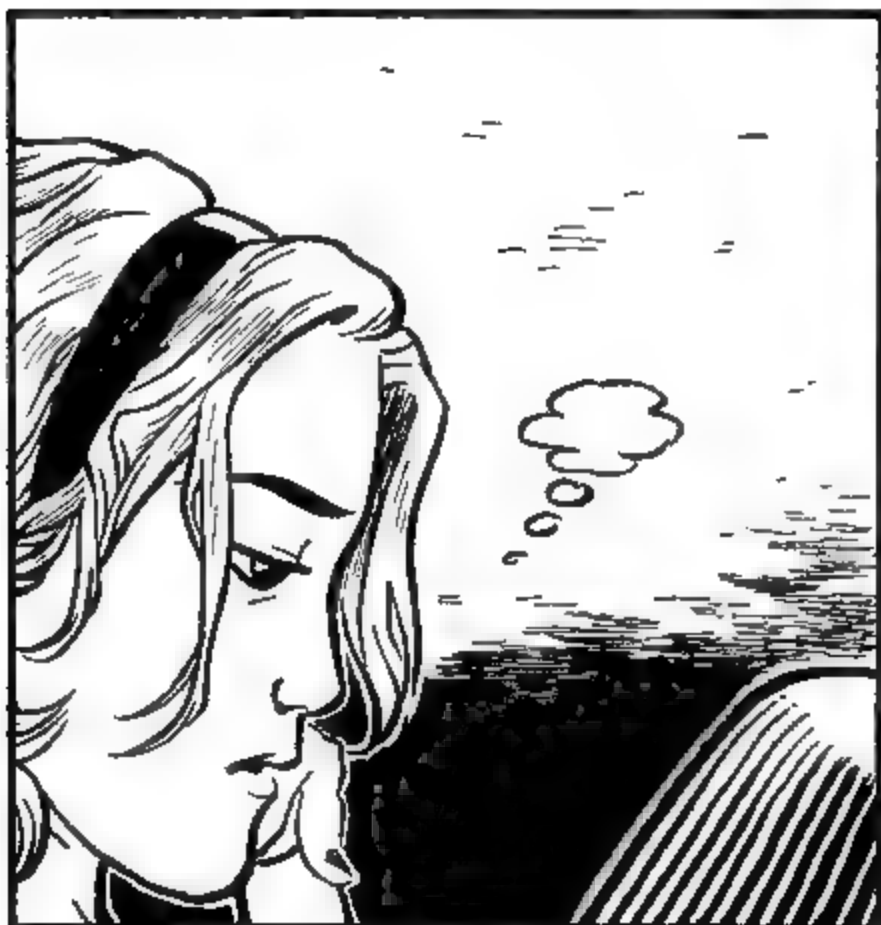
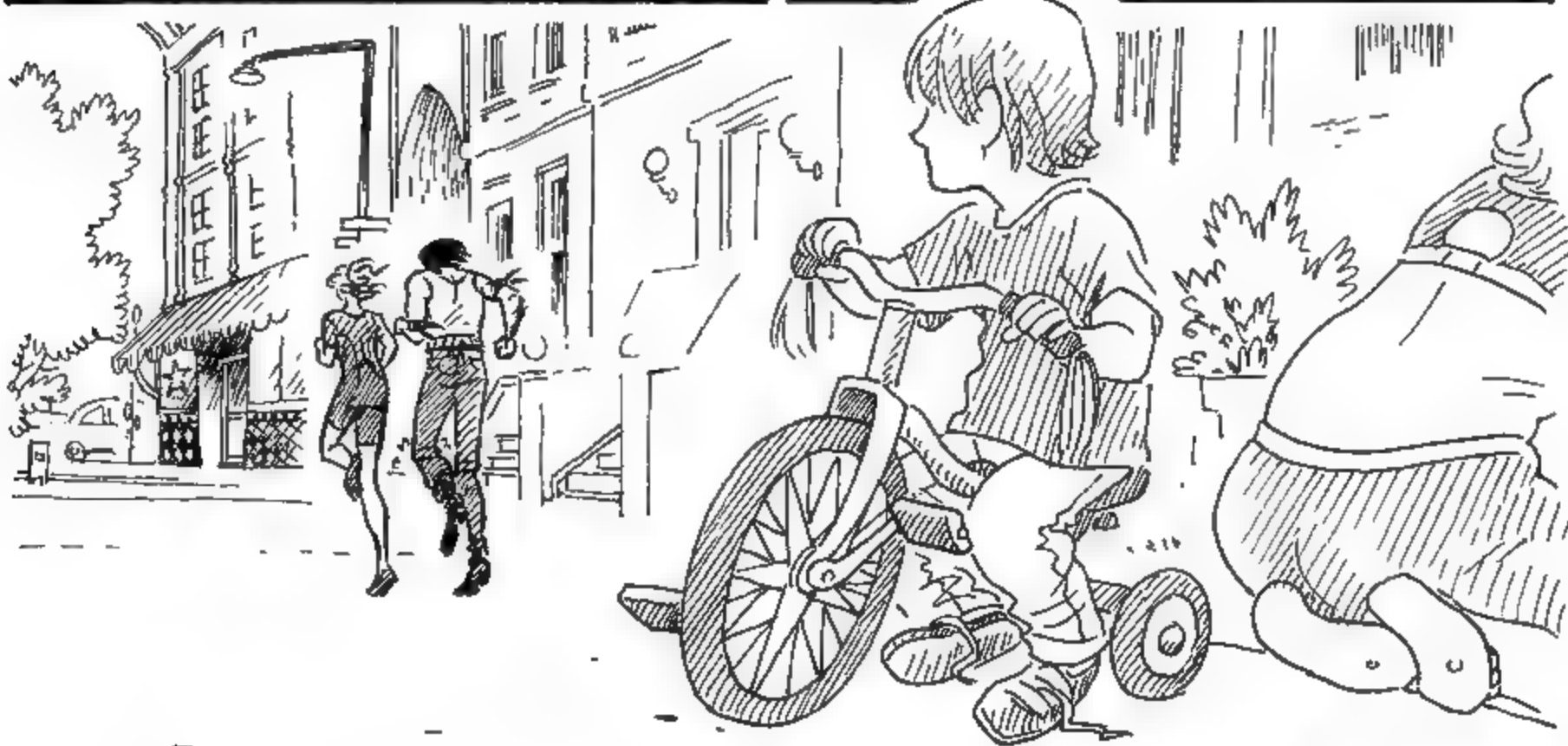
WHAT THE HELL CAN
I SAY TO HIS MOTHER,
SHE'S JUST GONNA
YELL AT ME --

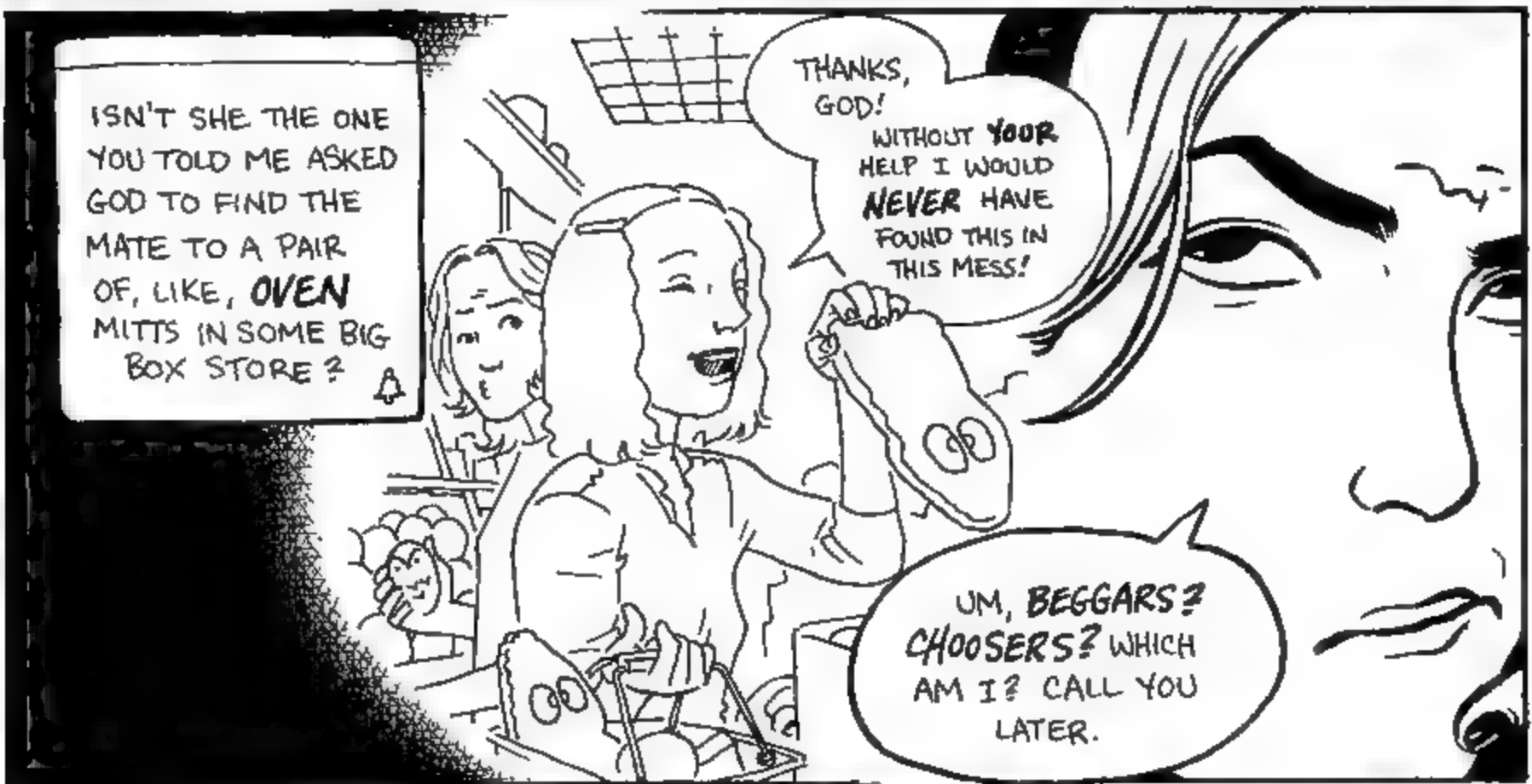
I CAN NOT WIN.

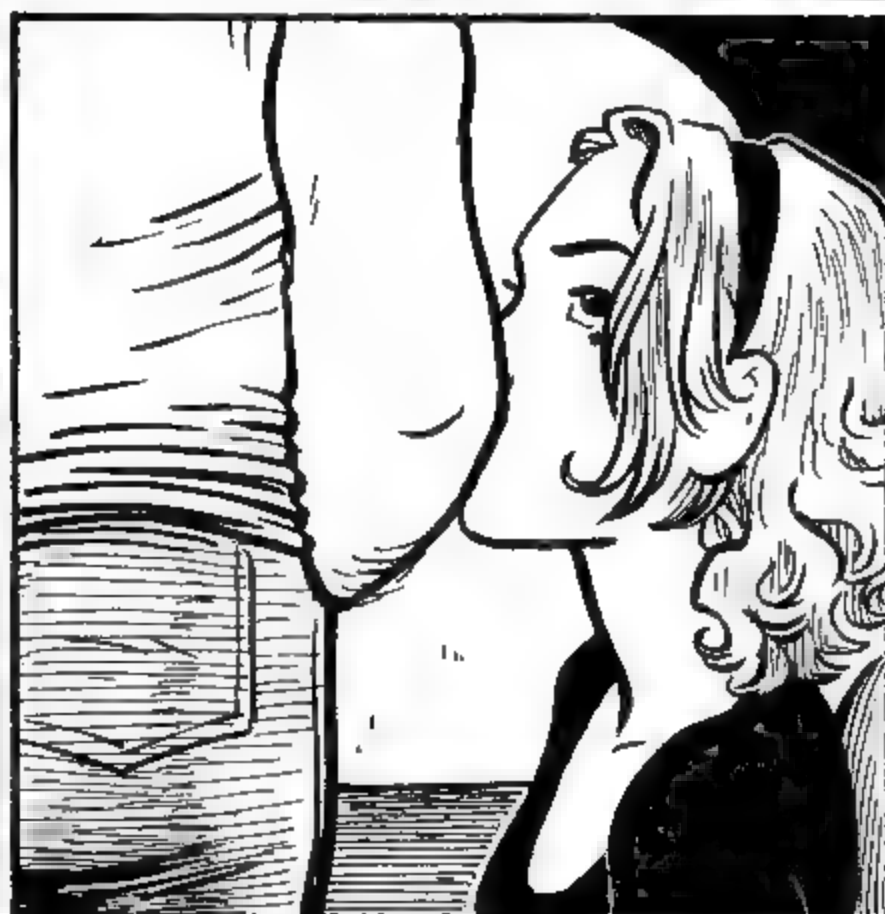
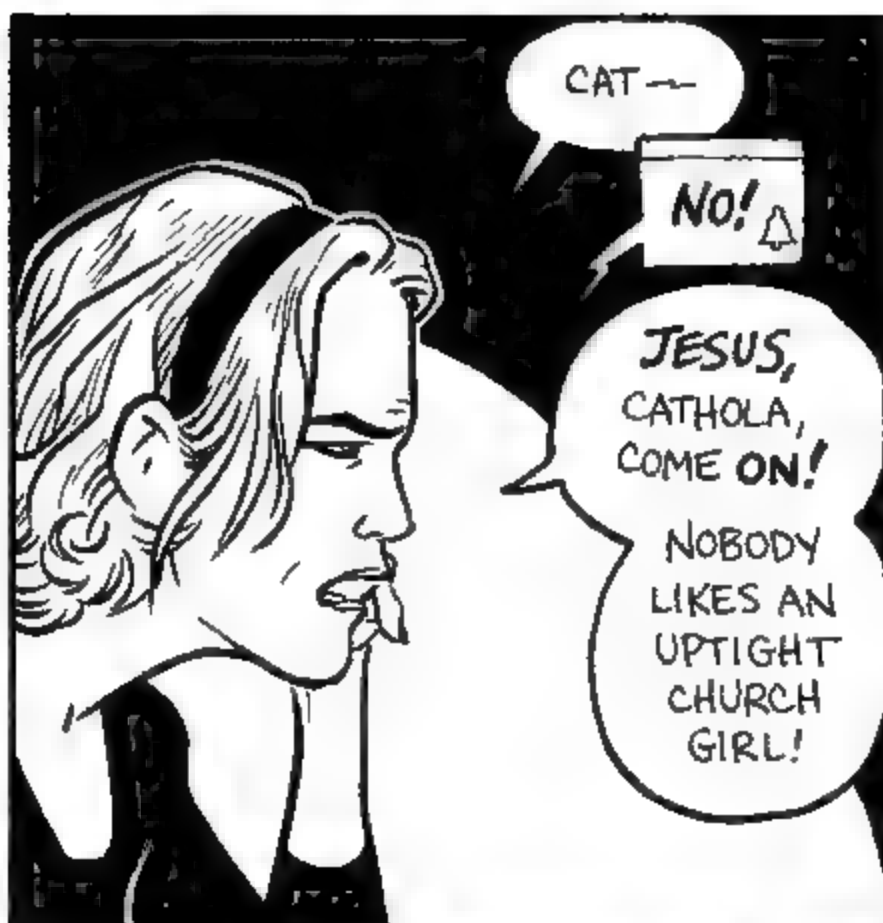
I AM **WEAK**, THERE IS
SOMETHING BASICALLY
UNABLE IN ME --

AND MAYBE HE **IS** ONLY **THREE**,
BUT PEOPLE JUST LIKE HIM WILL
STARE ME DOWN ALL MY **LIFE**,
I'M JUST **USELESS** SOMEHOW,
AND PEOPLE ALWAYS **KNOW**--



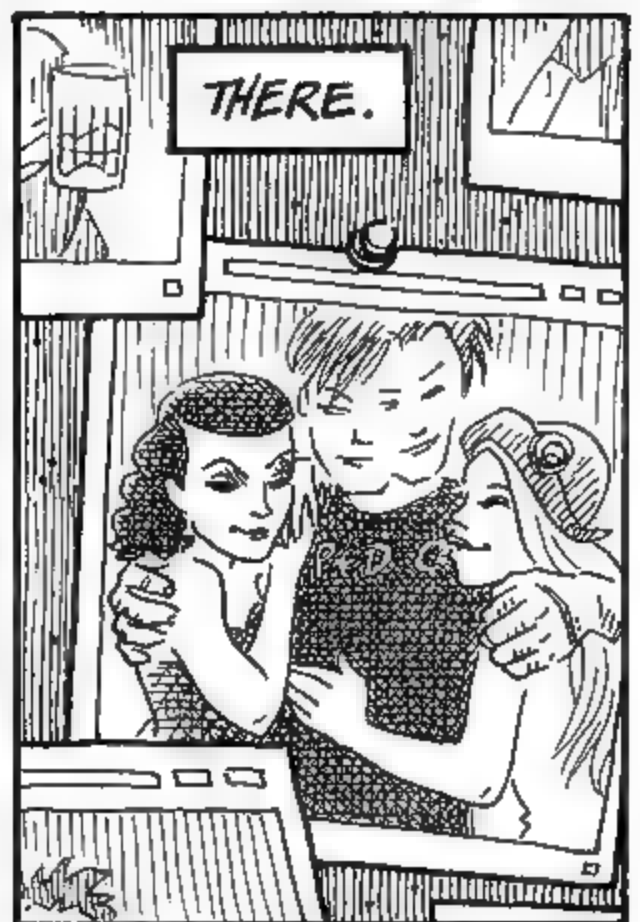
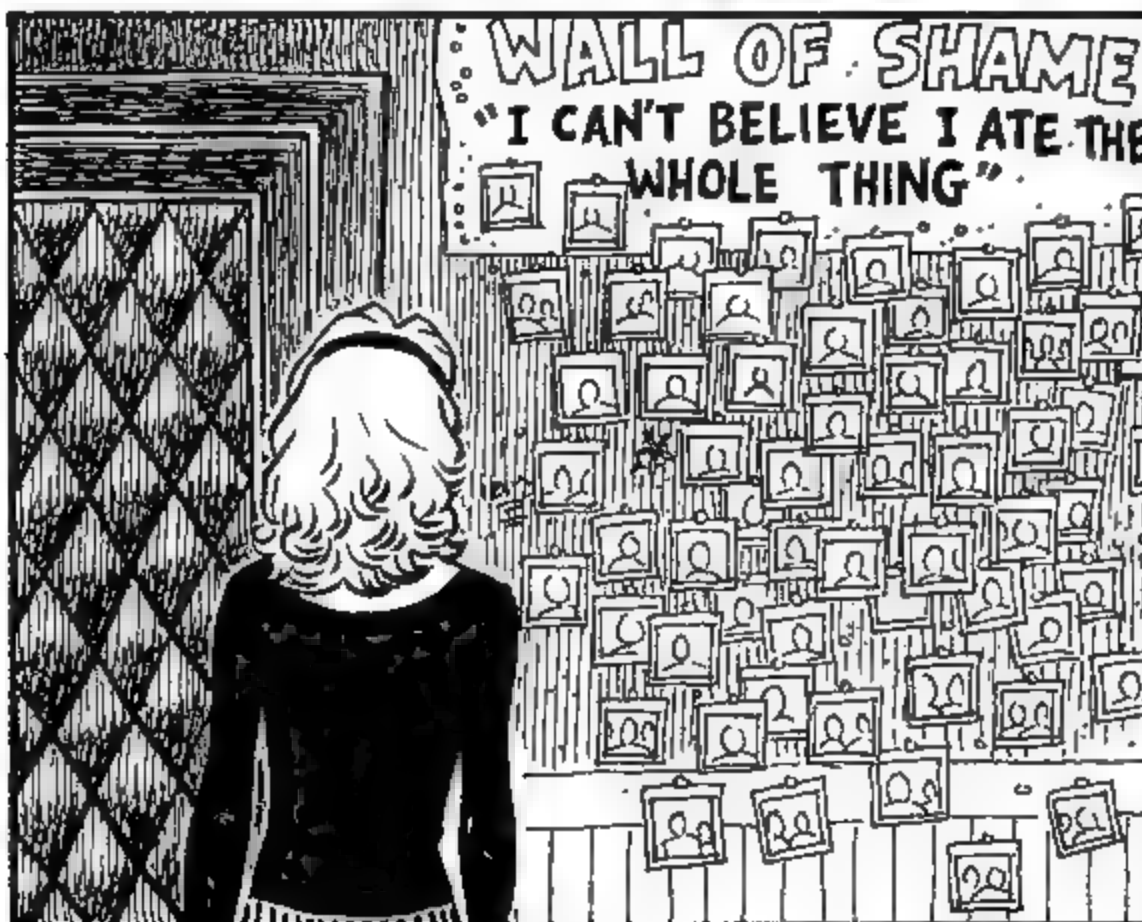


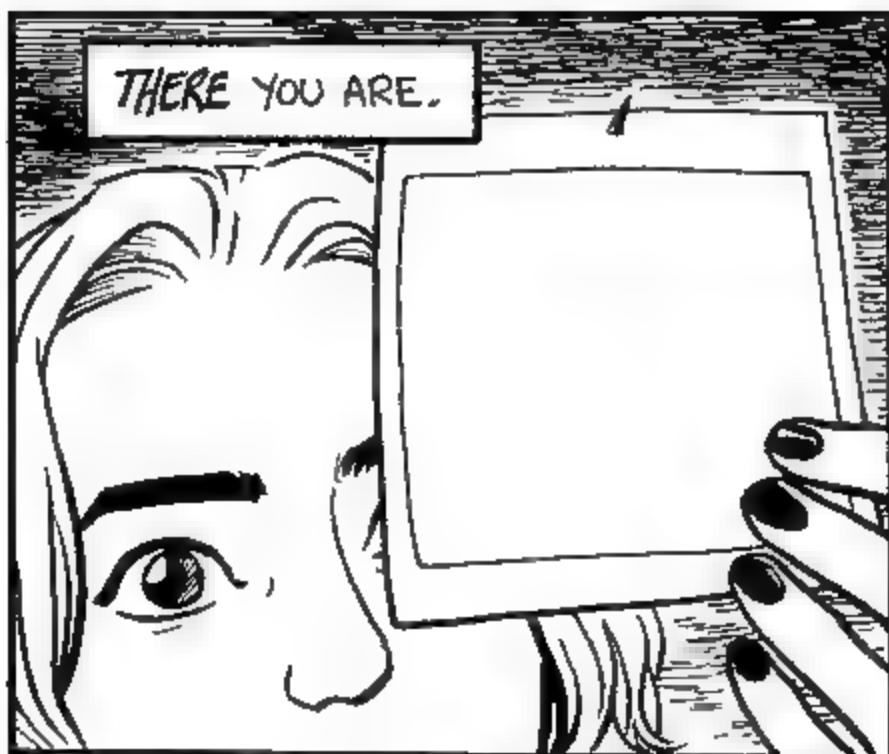




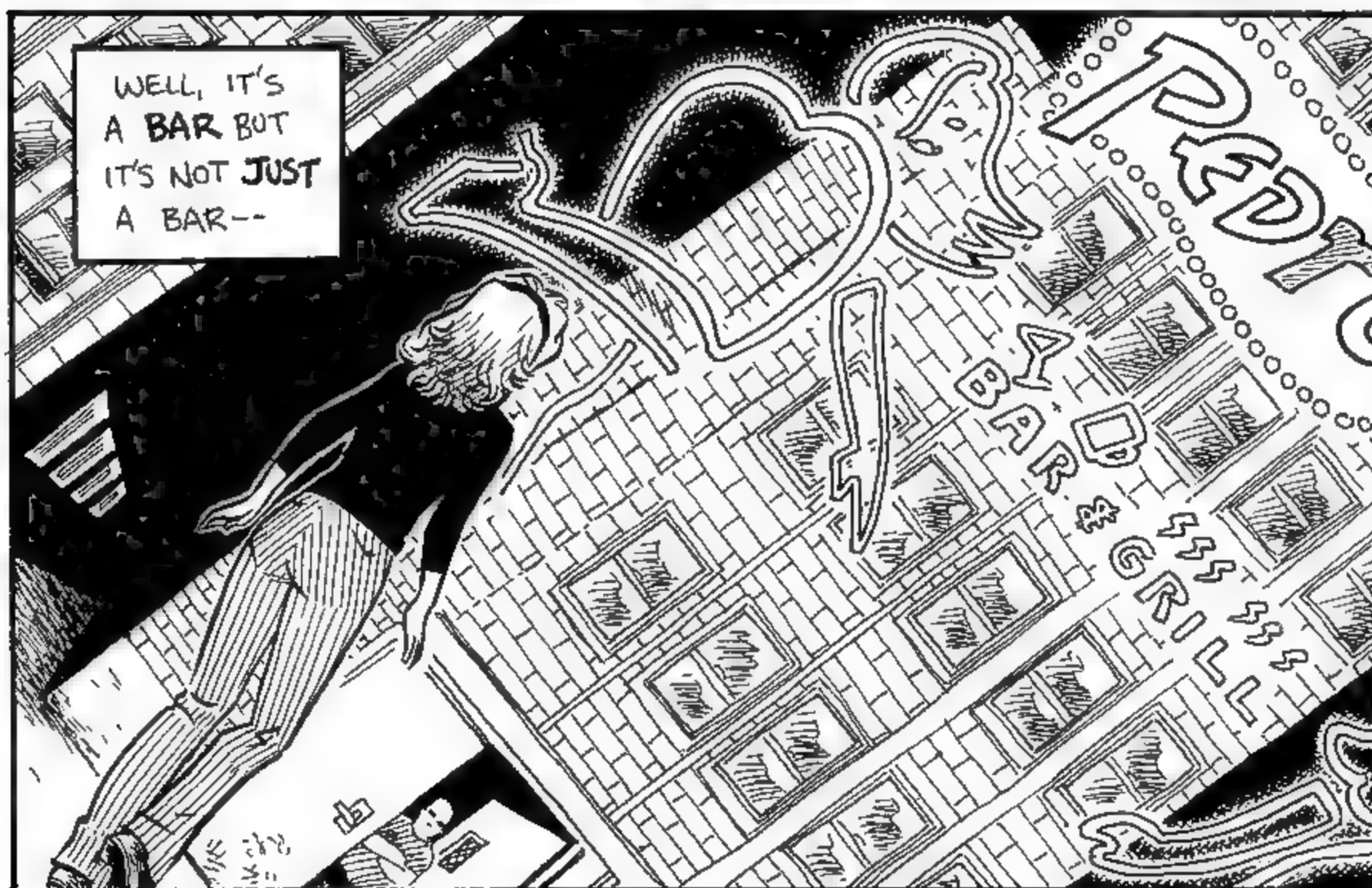
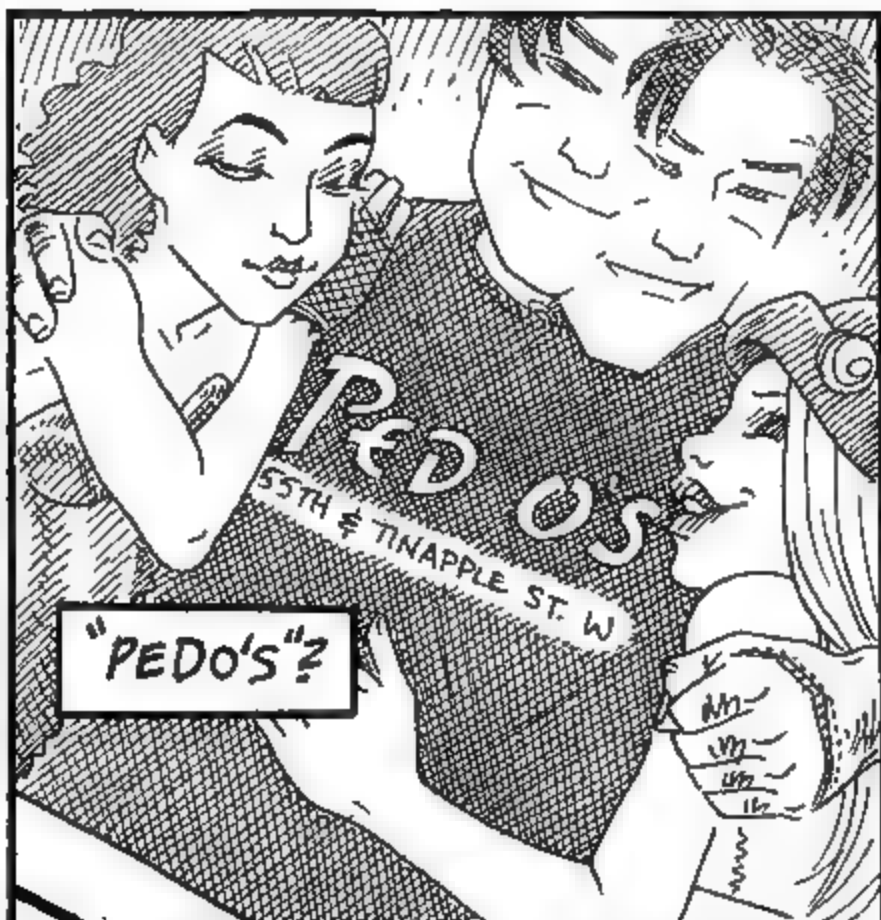


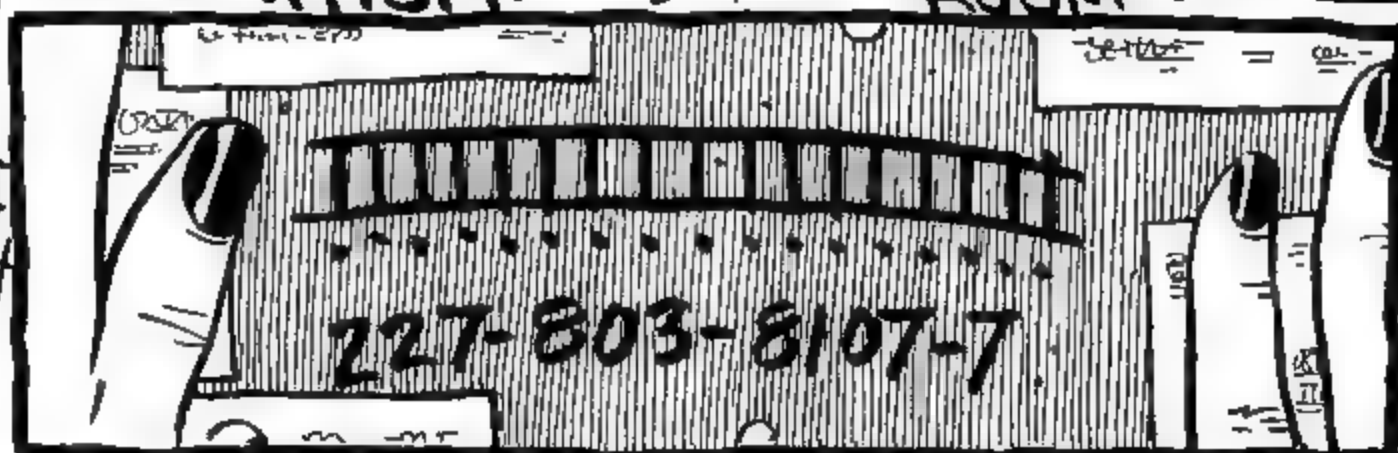


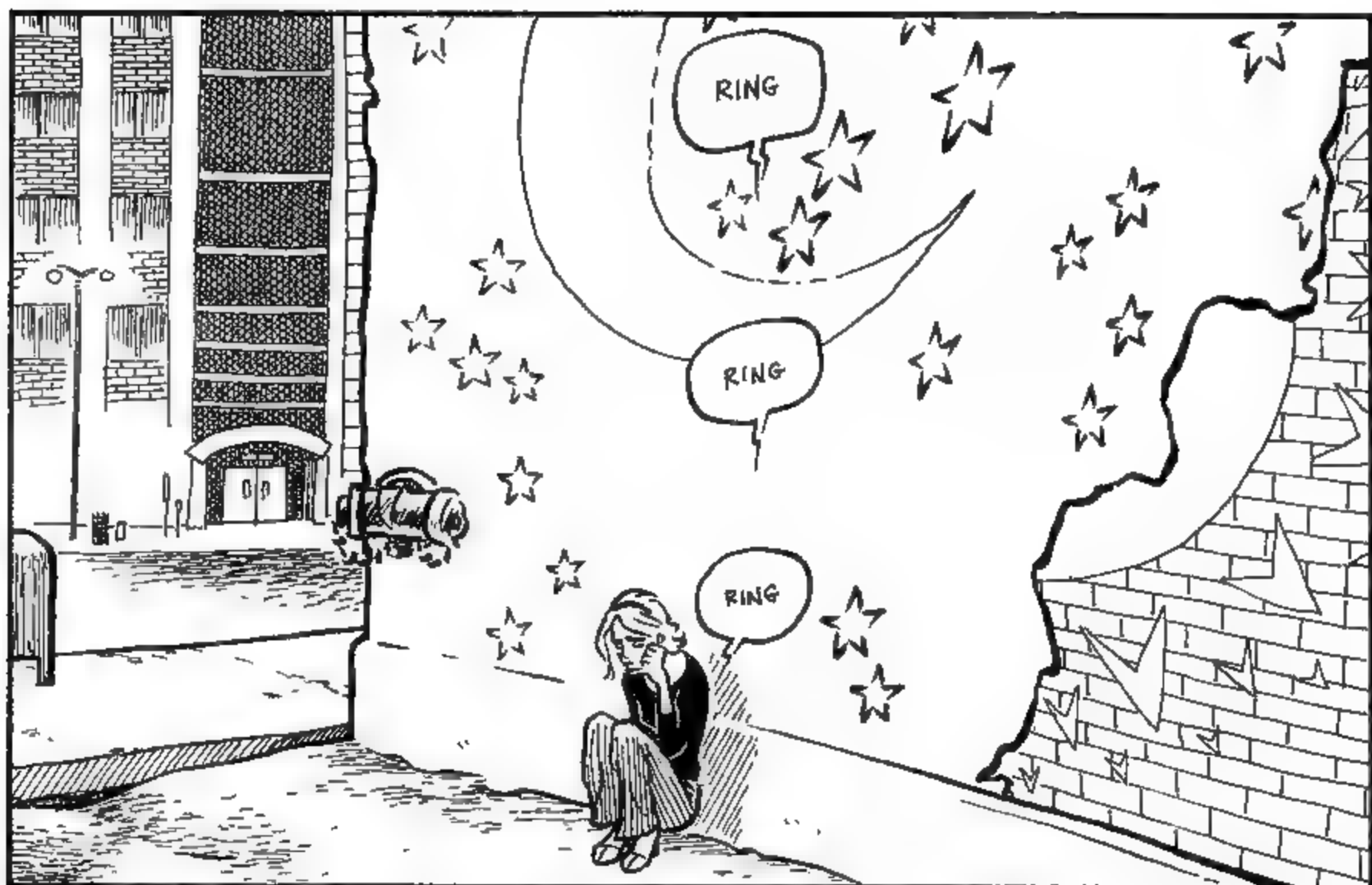




OH, YOU HAVE A WAY OF FLINCHING JUST AS A CAMERA EYE CLOSES, SO YOU'RE NEVER IN FOCUS IN STILL PICS, BUT IT'S YOU.



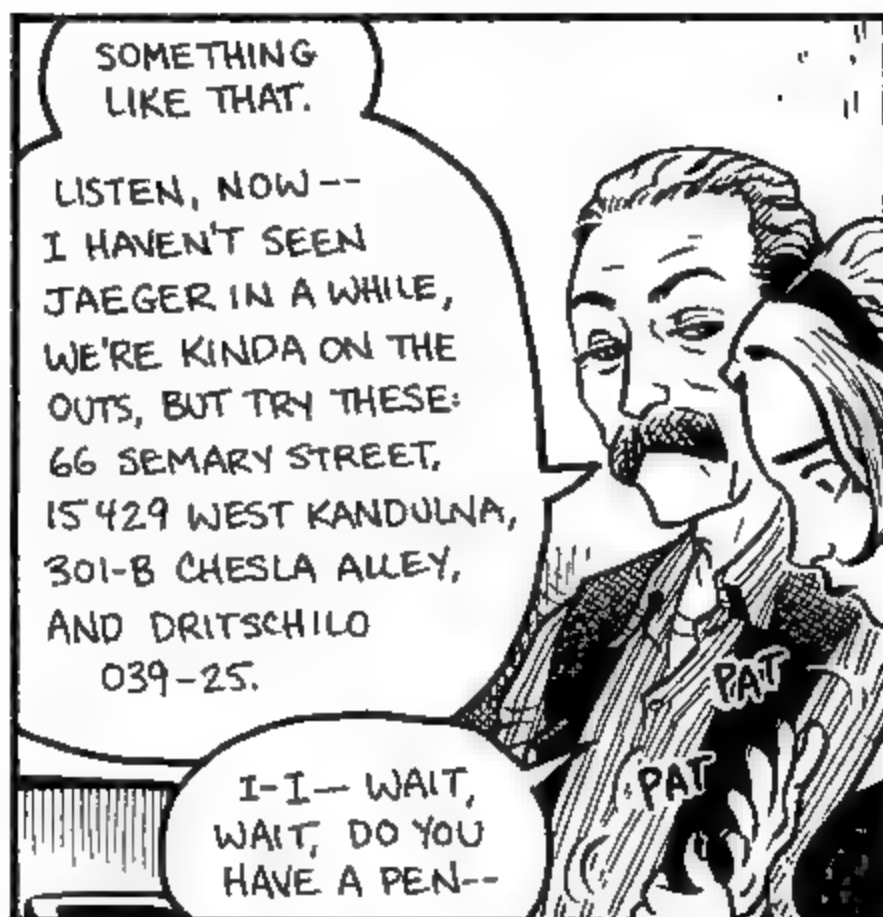


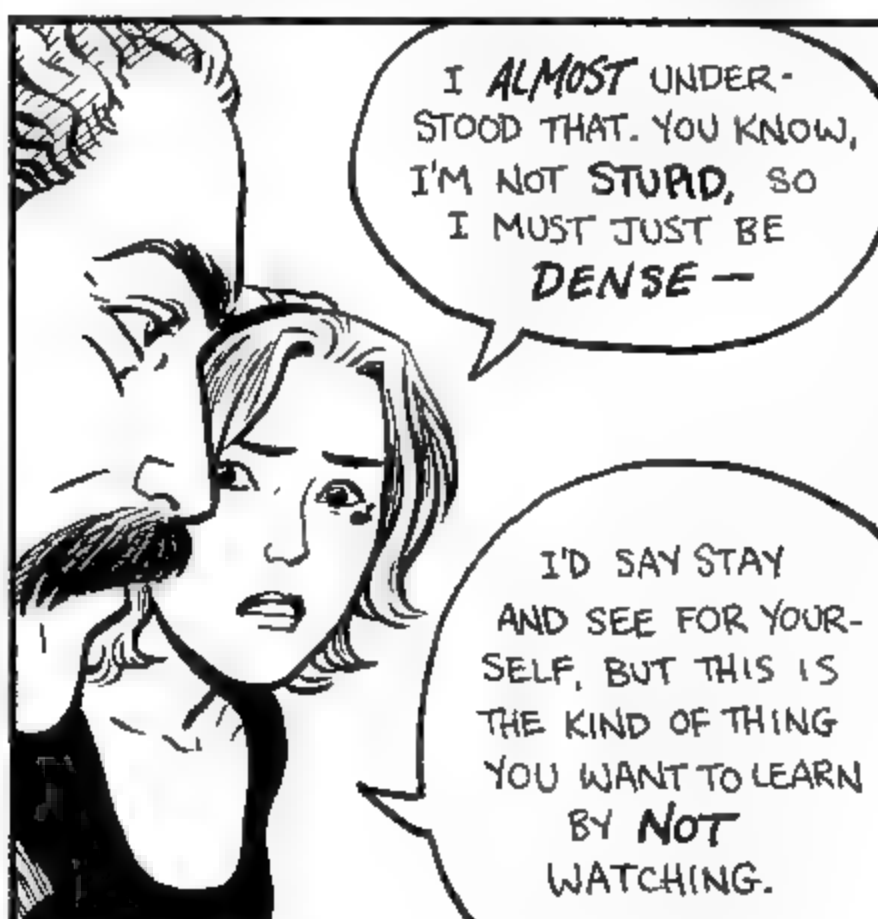
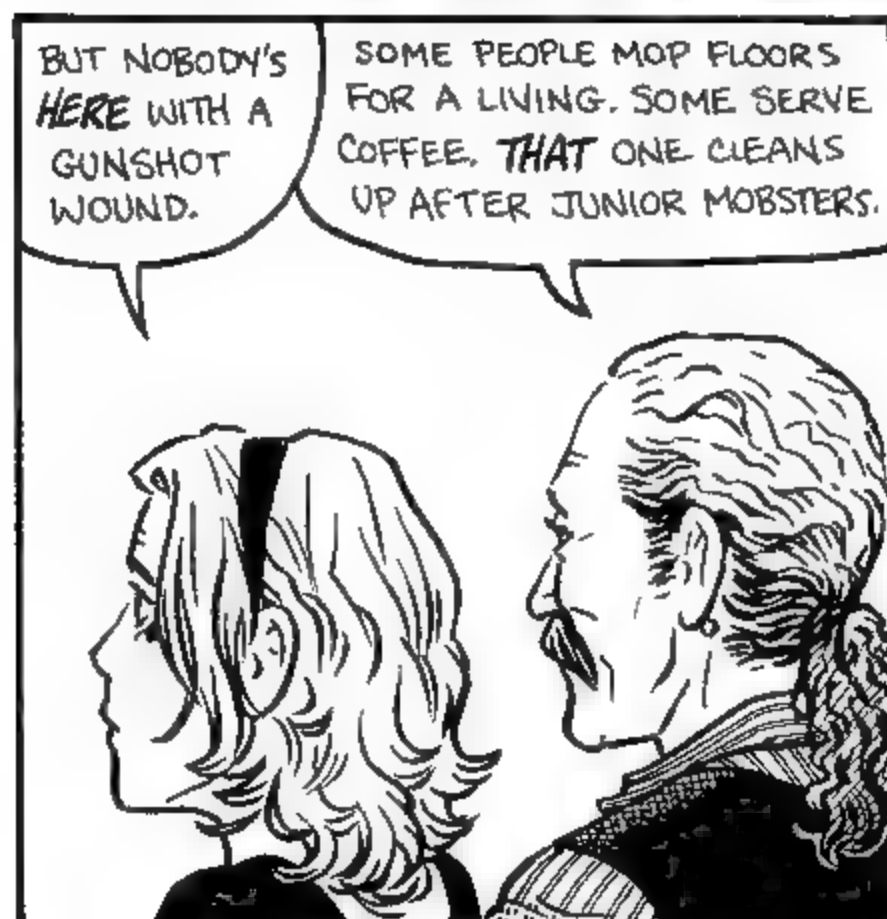
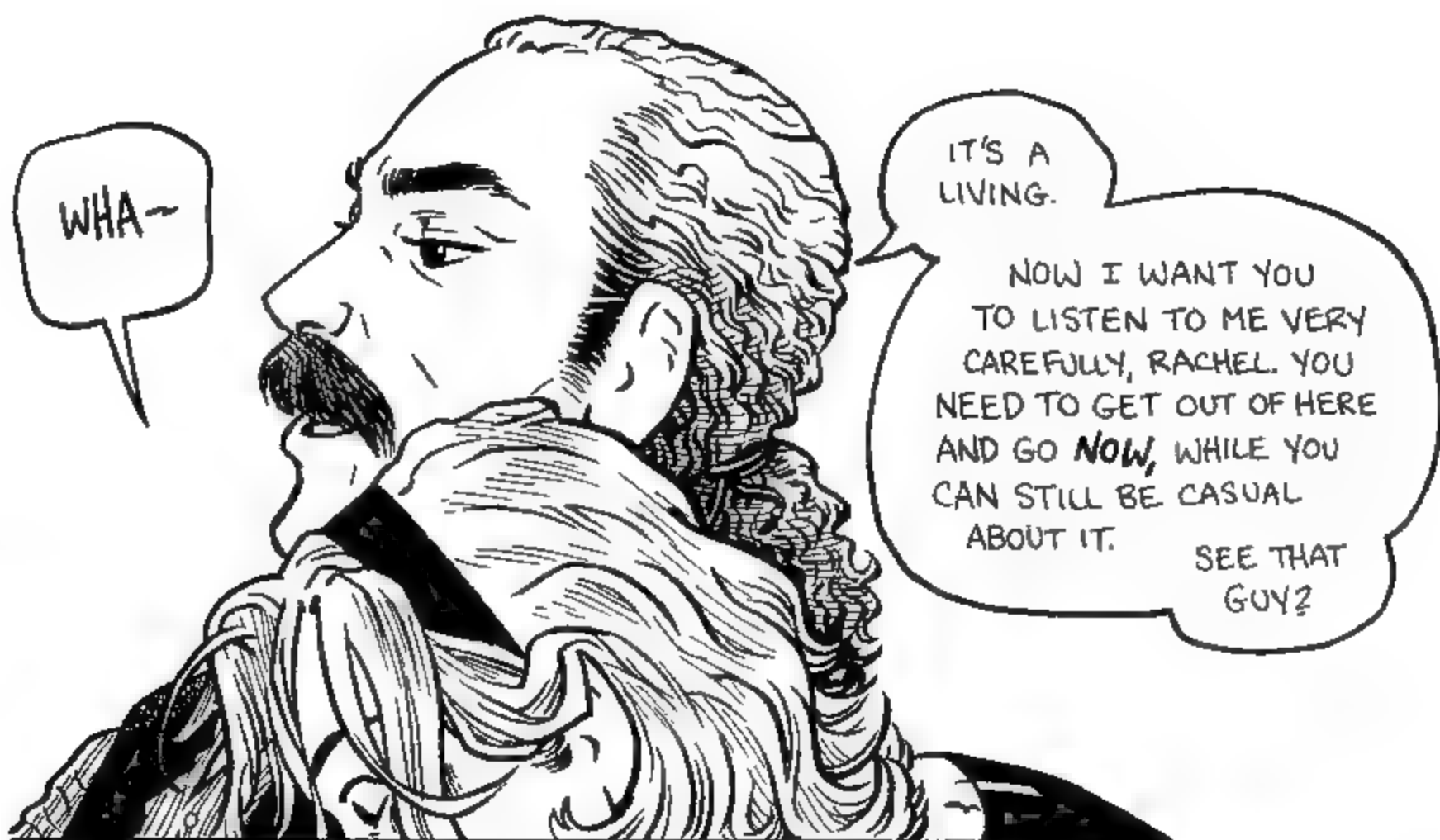


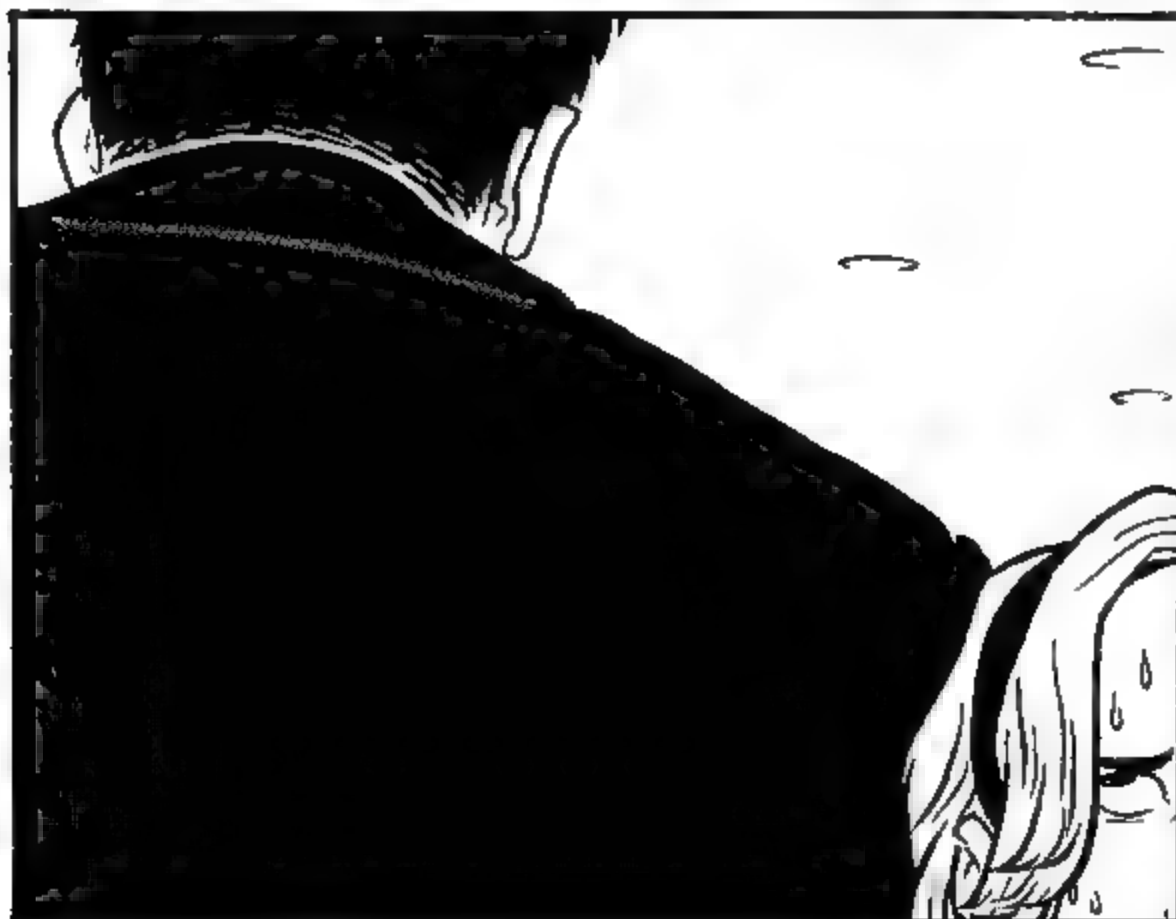


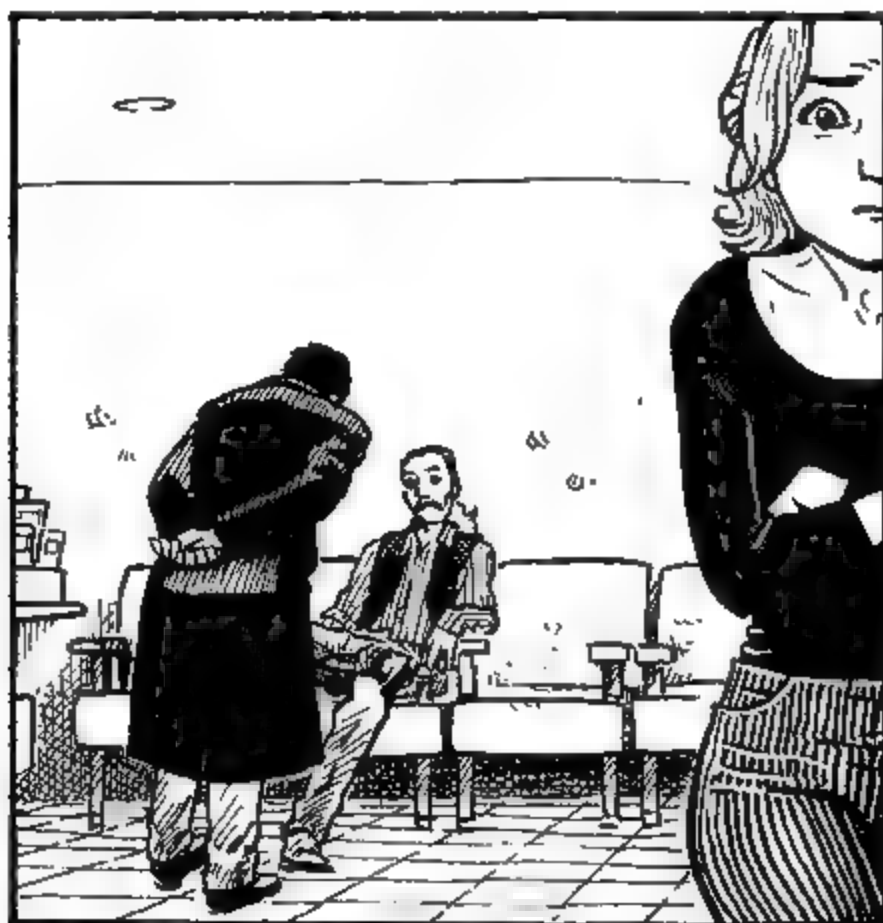


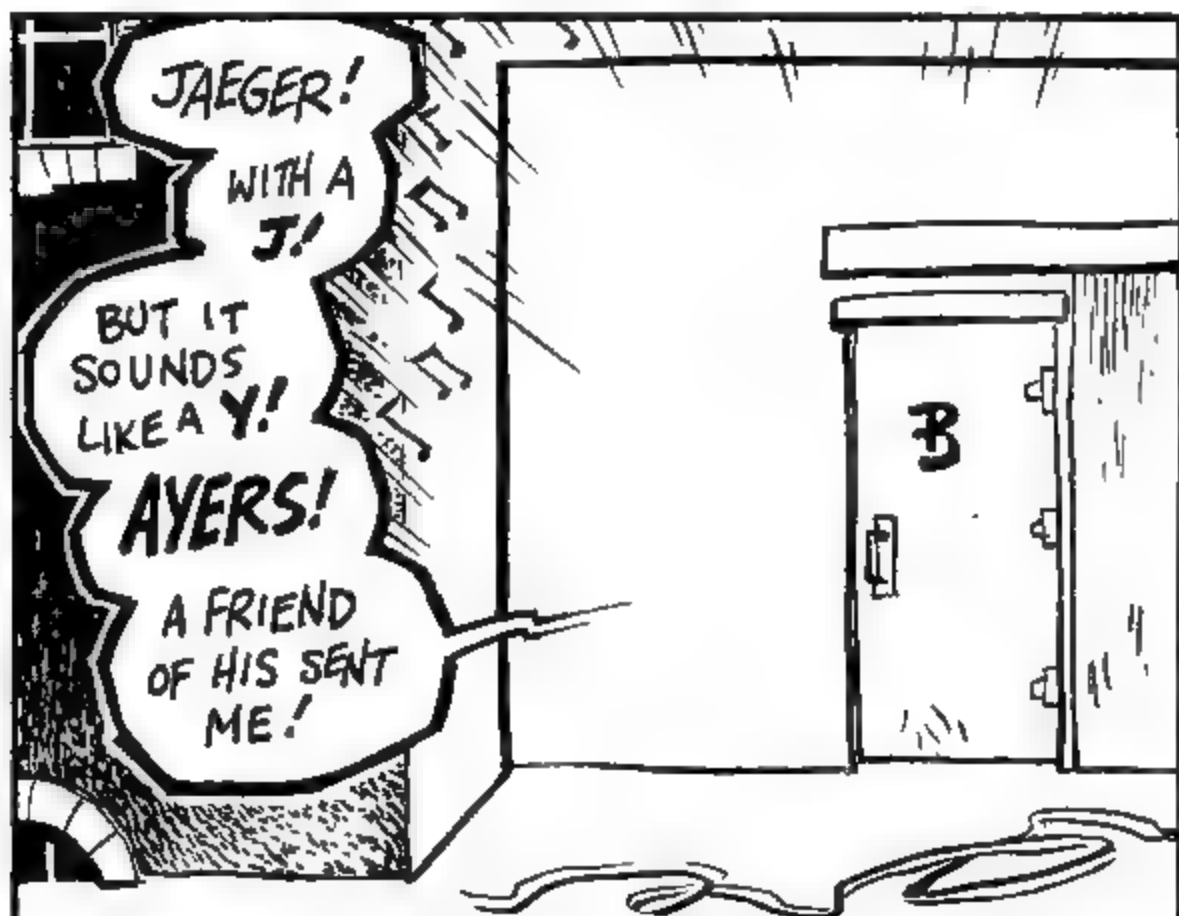






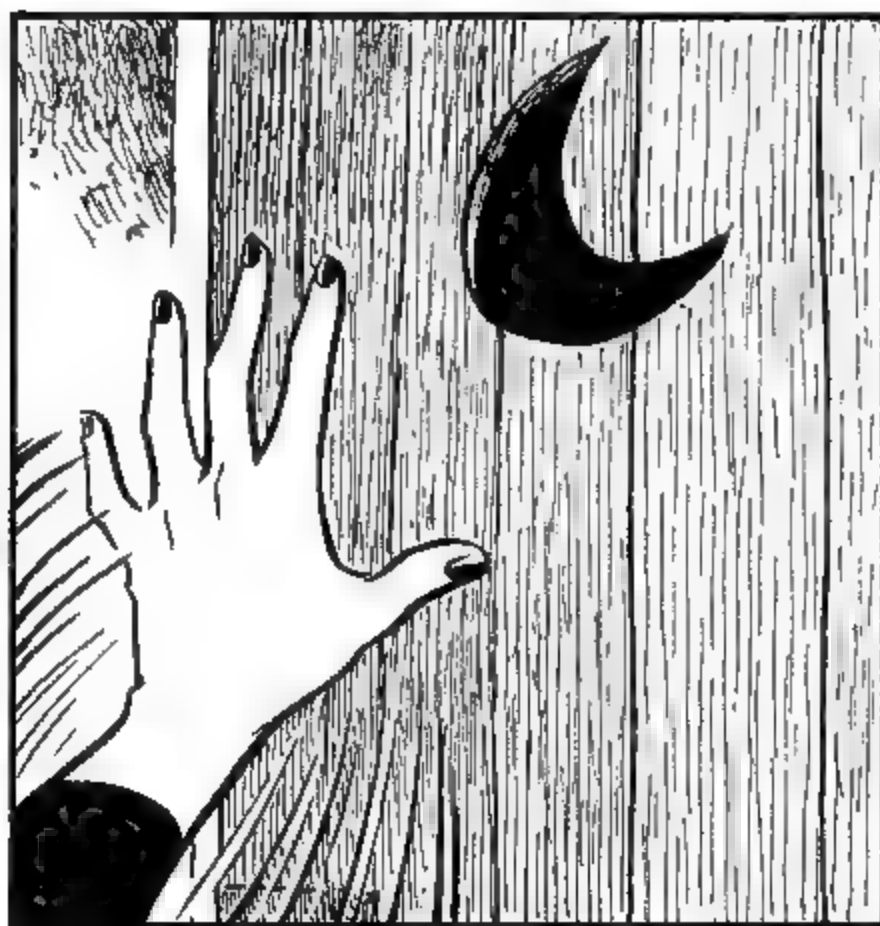


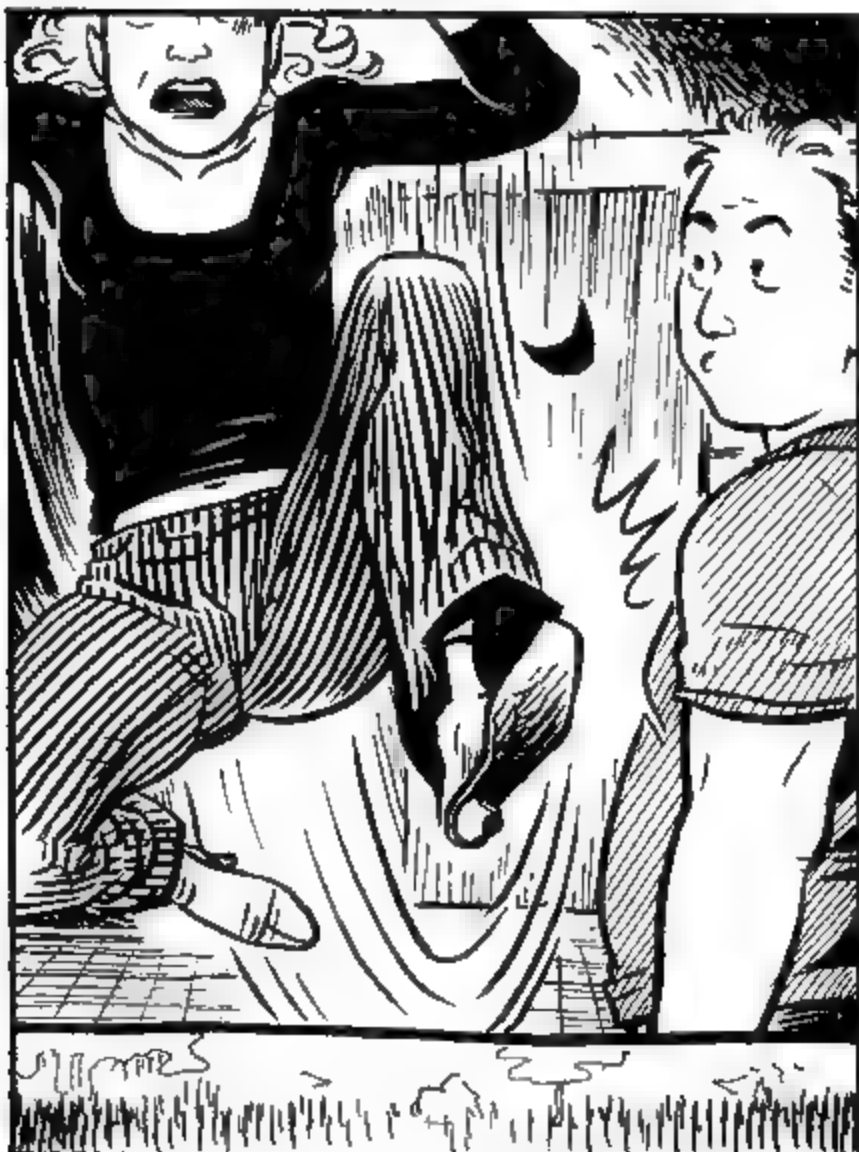


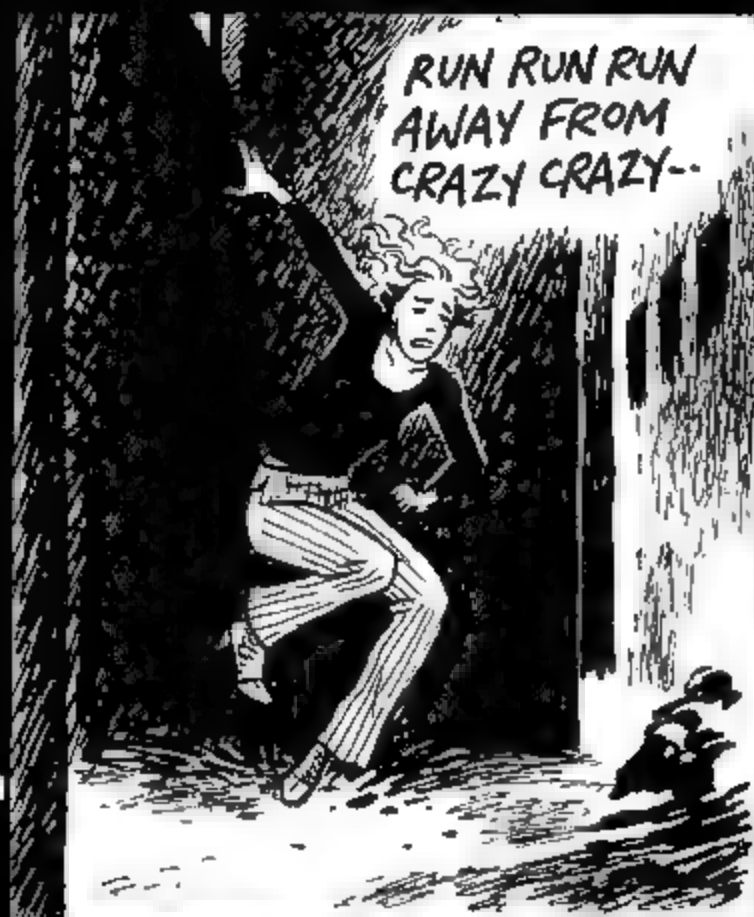












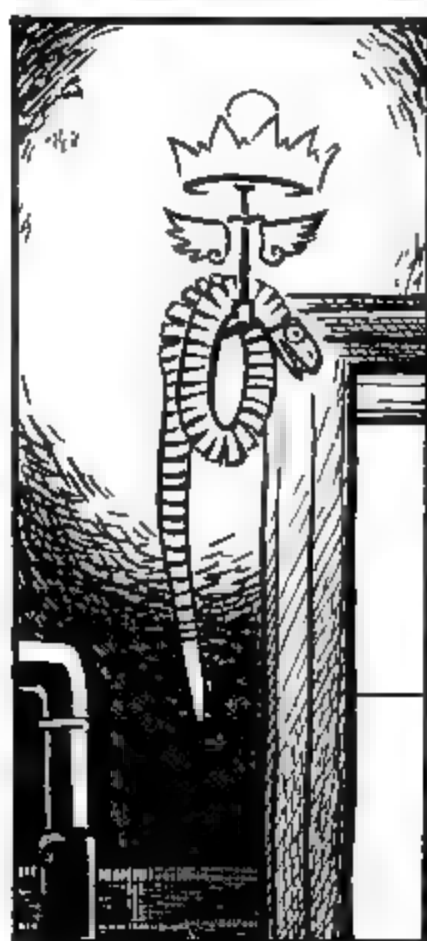
RUN RUN RUN
AWAY FROM
CRAZY CRAZY--

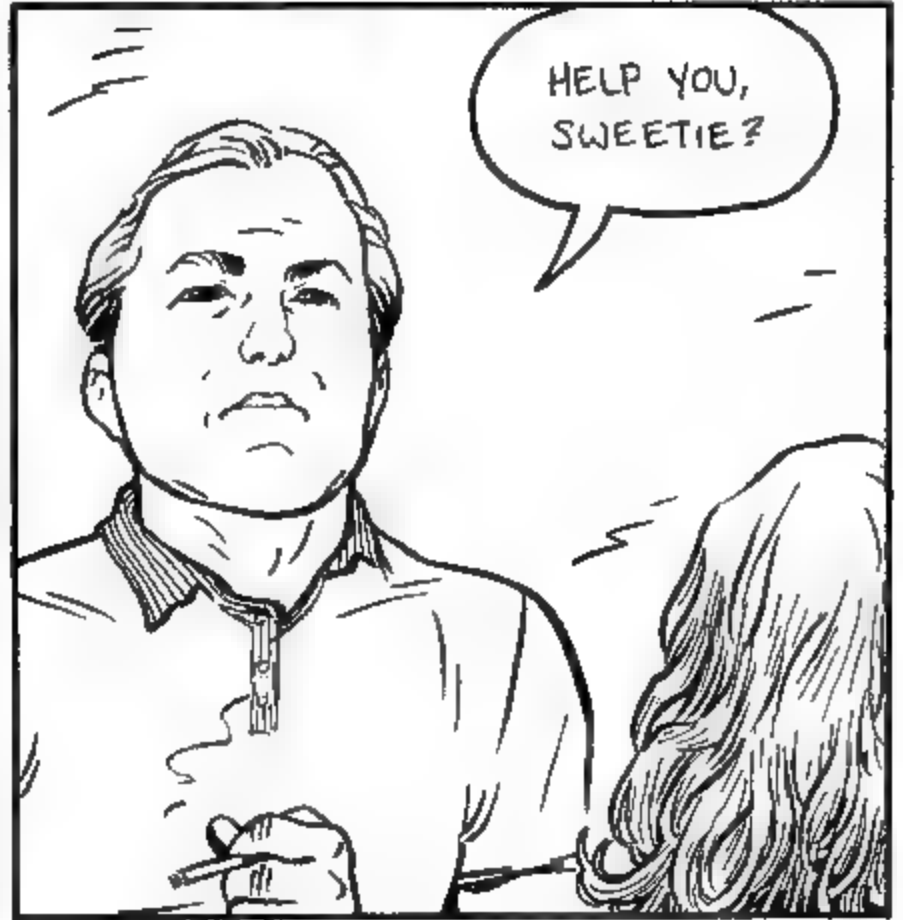
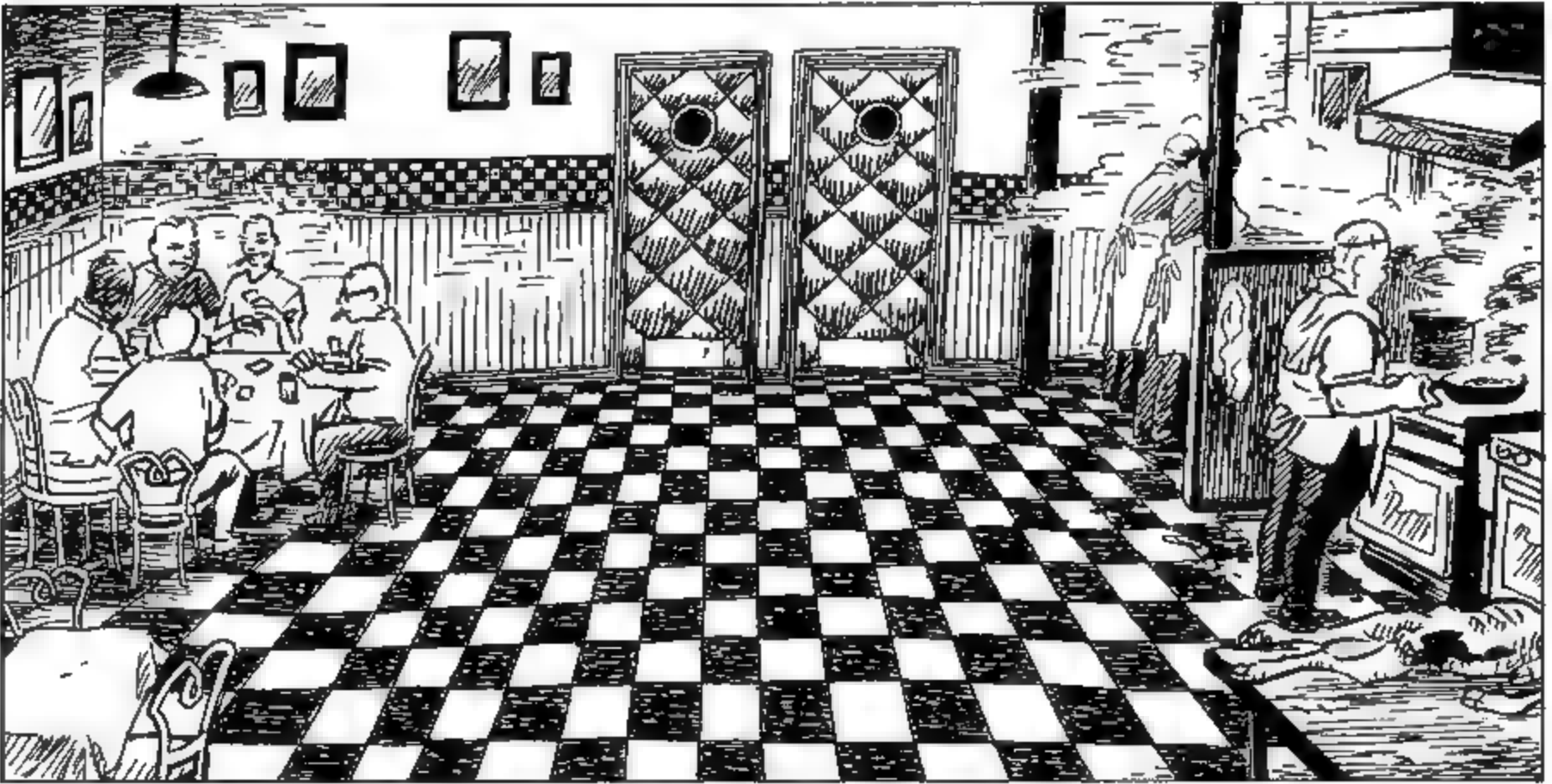


-- CAN'T RUN TO THE STREET
CRAZY CRAZY'LL BE THERE--

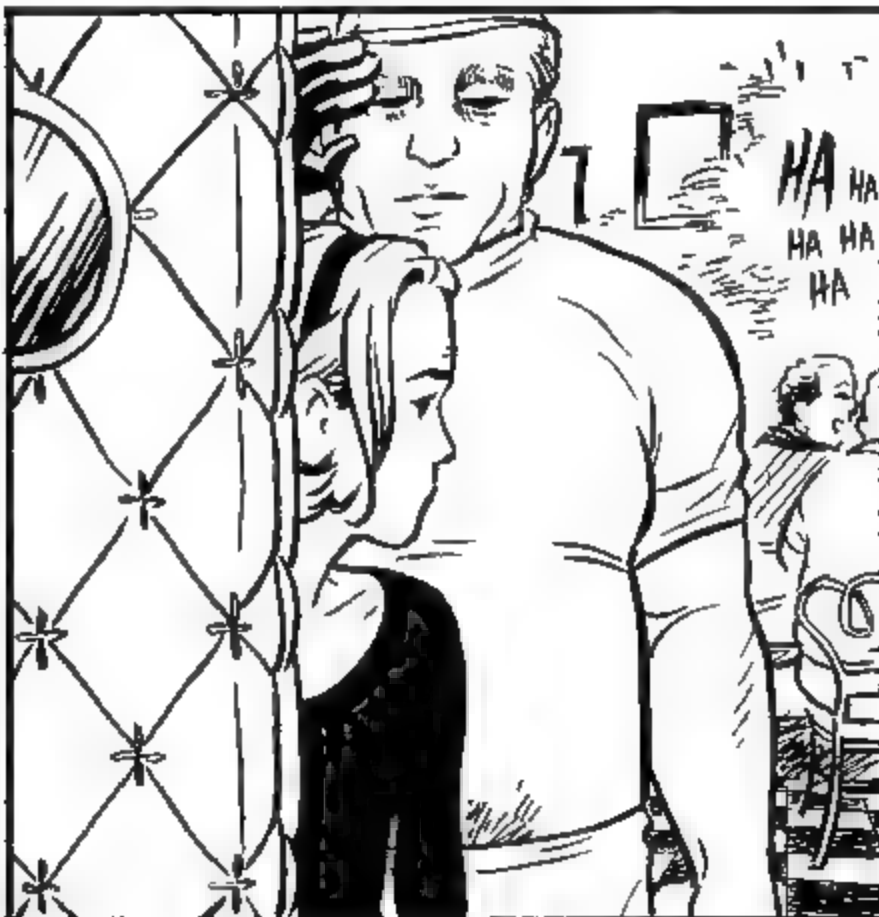
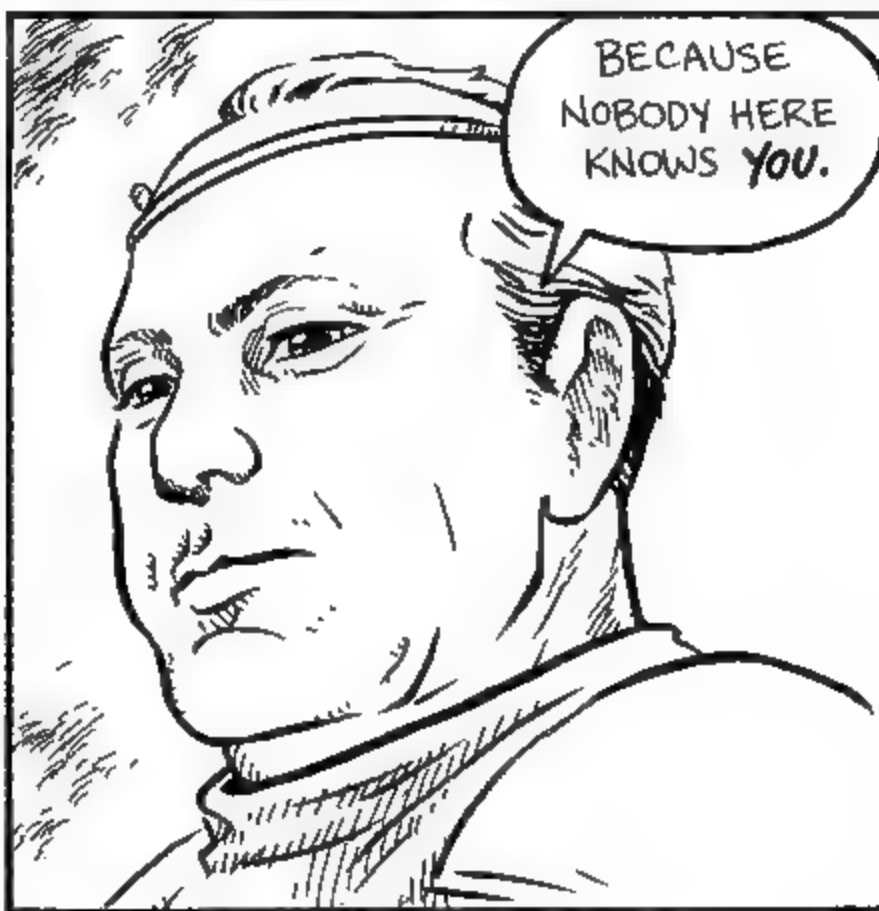
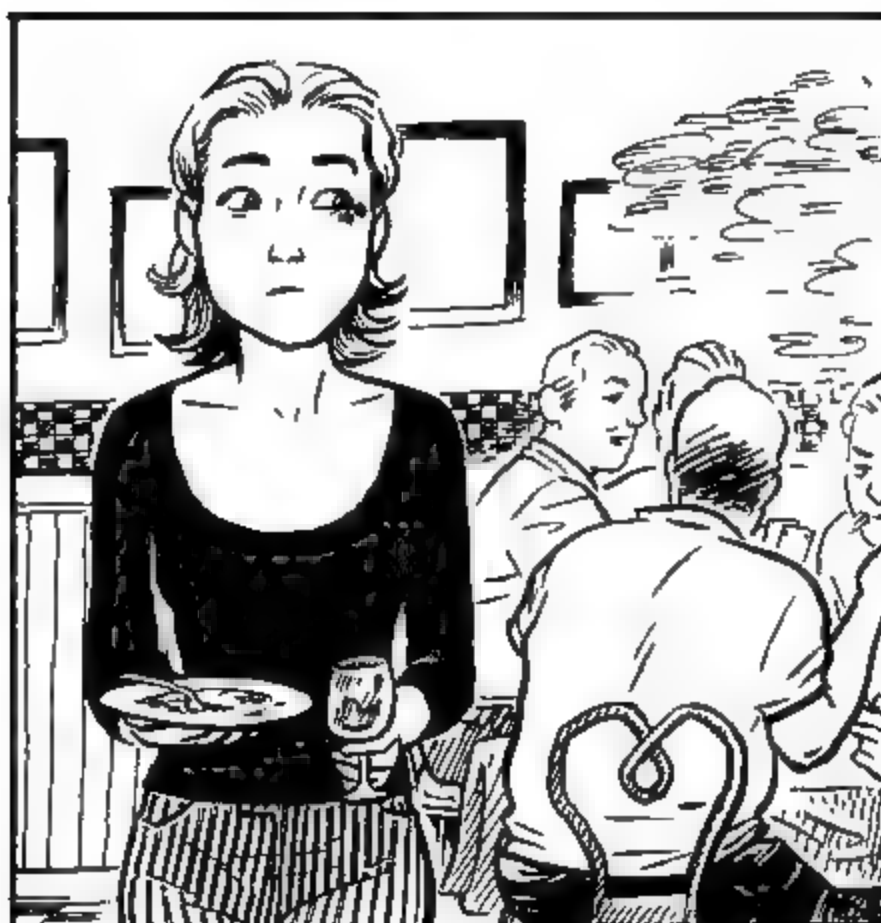
-- RUN RUN
CRAZY CRAZY--

OH WHY ARE NONE
OF THESE HOUSES HOME
WHY CAN'T I JUST RUN
INTO ONE OF THESE HOMES
AND BELONG HERE SAFE

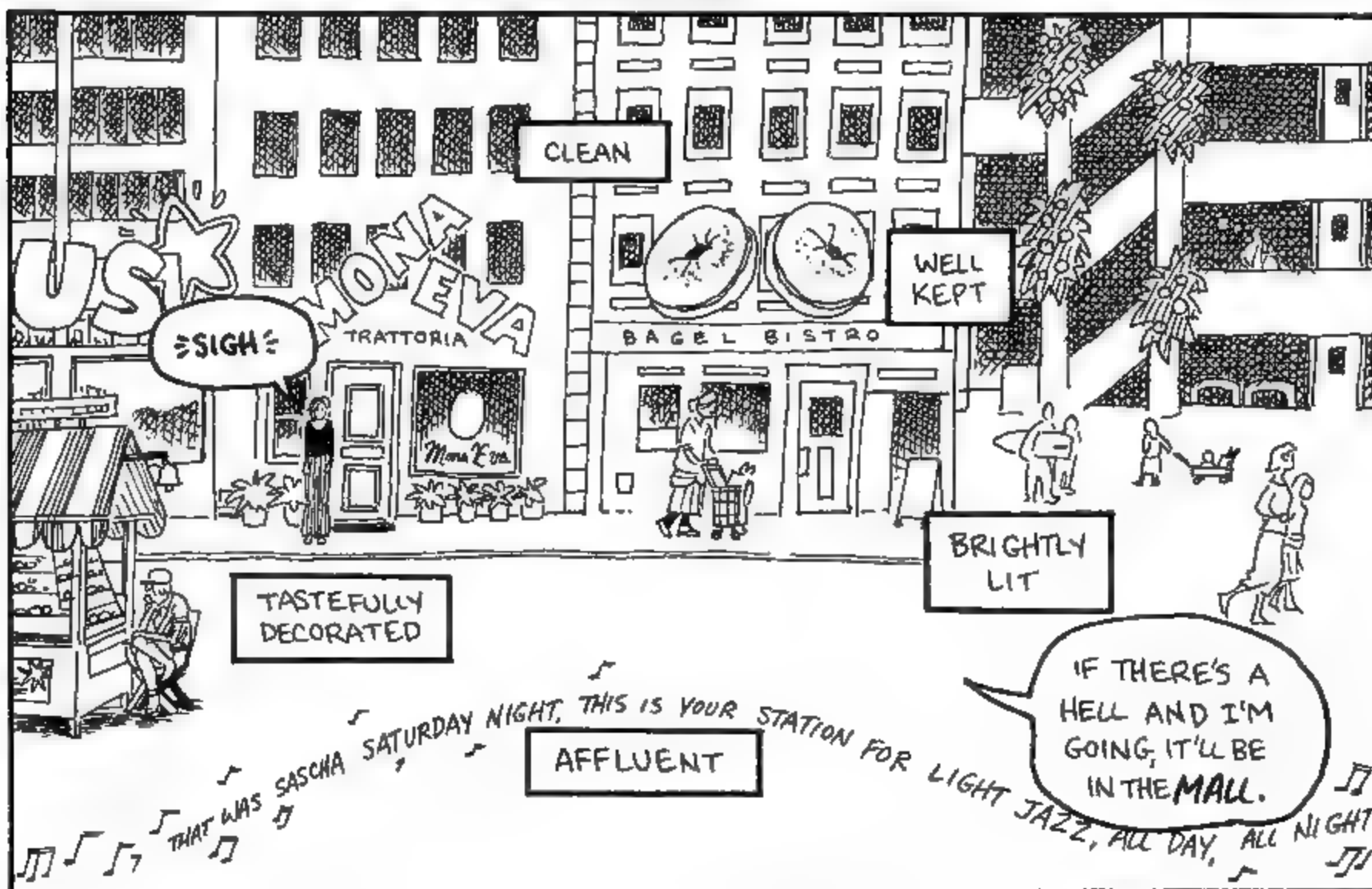
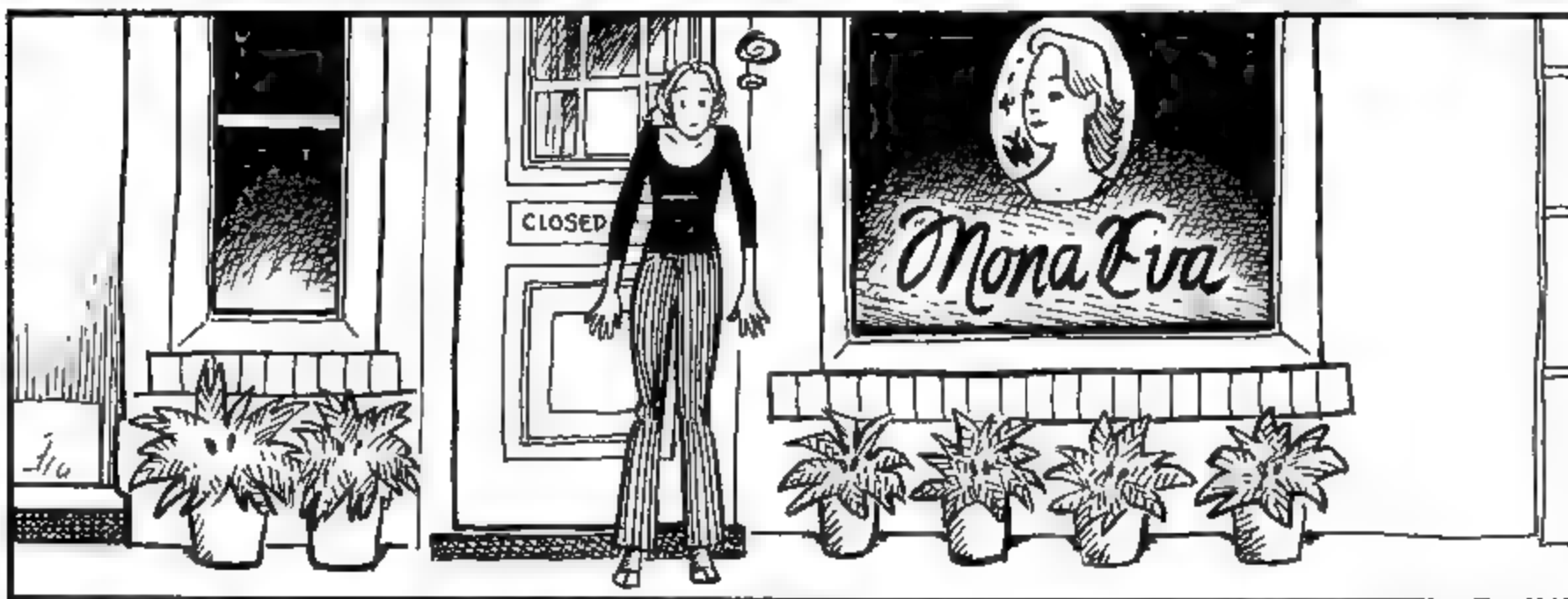


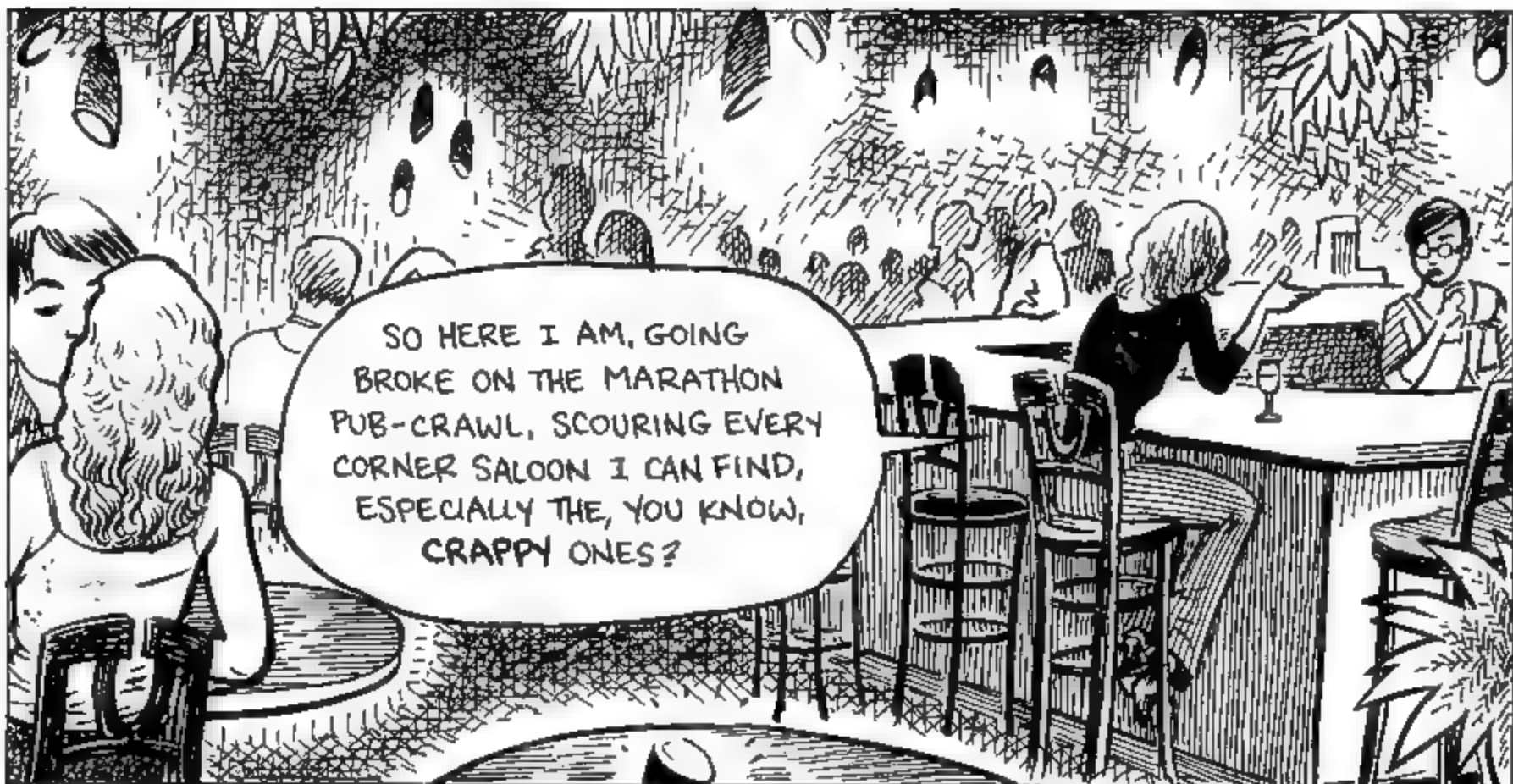


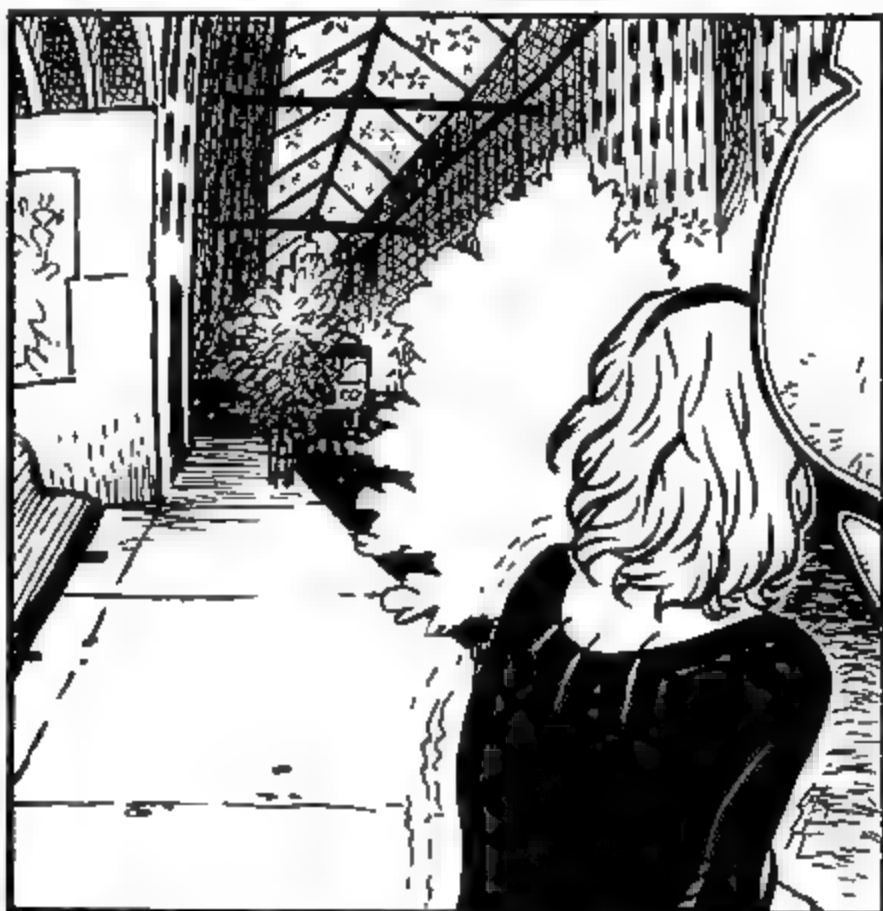
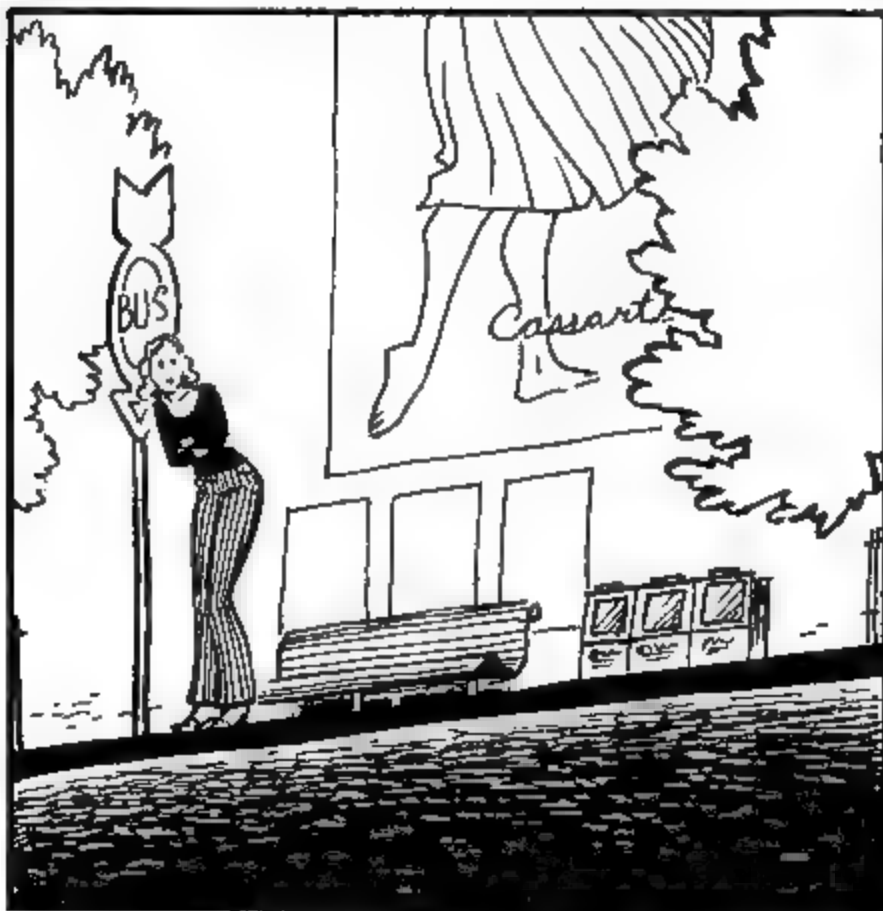


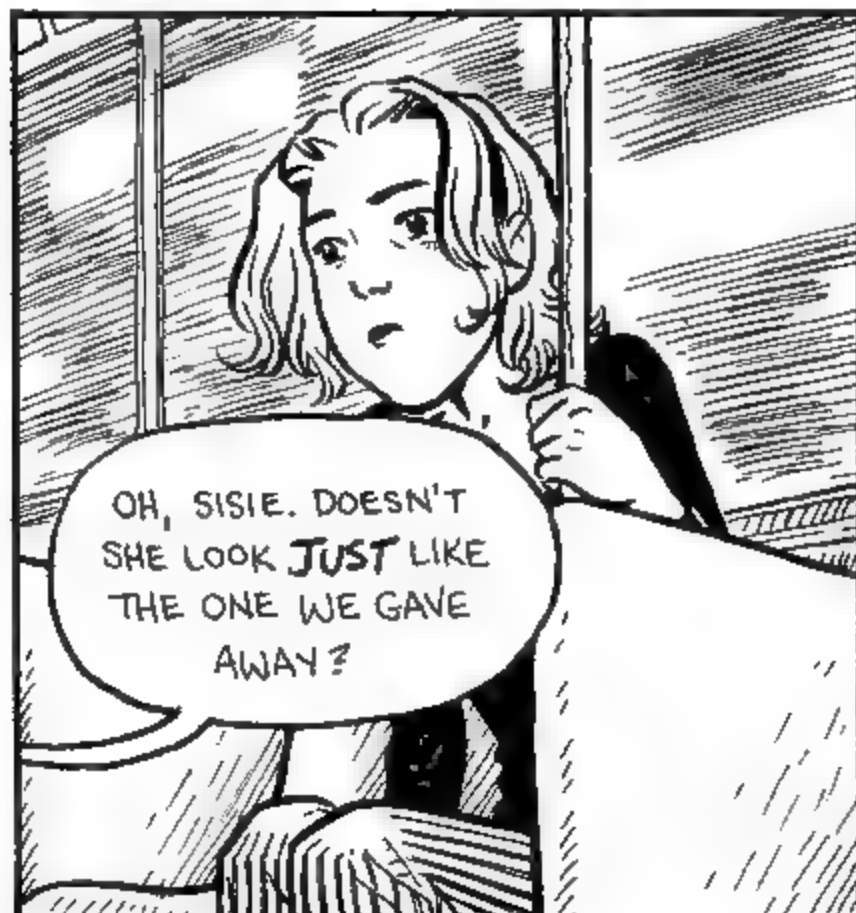
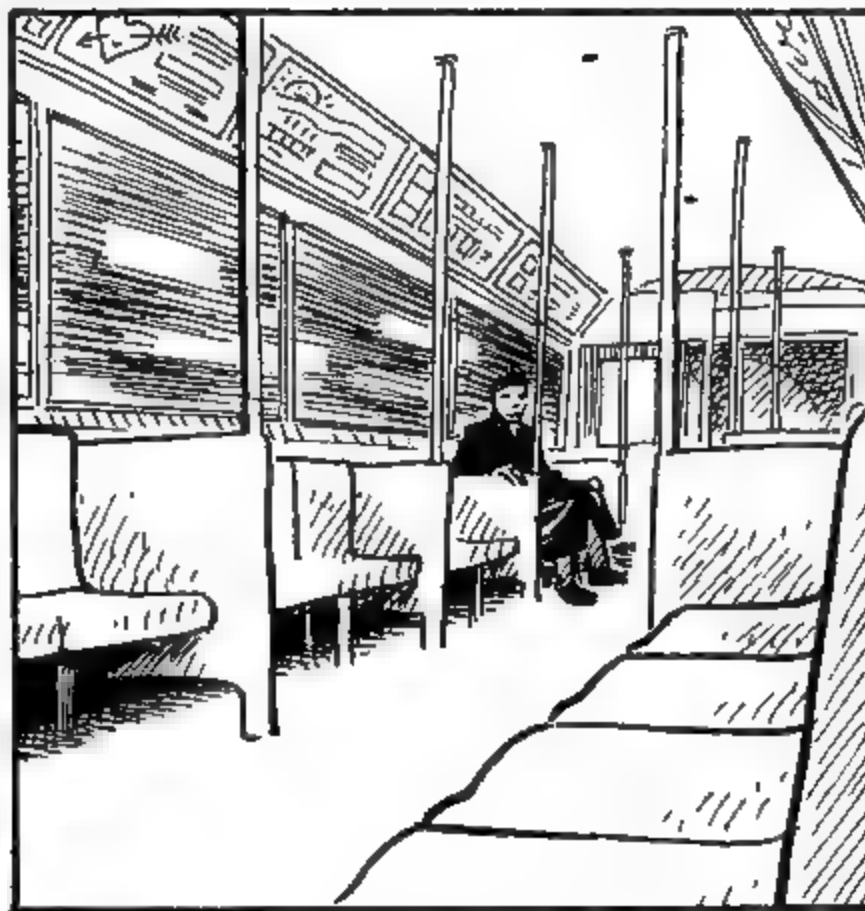


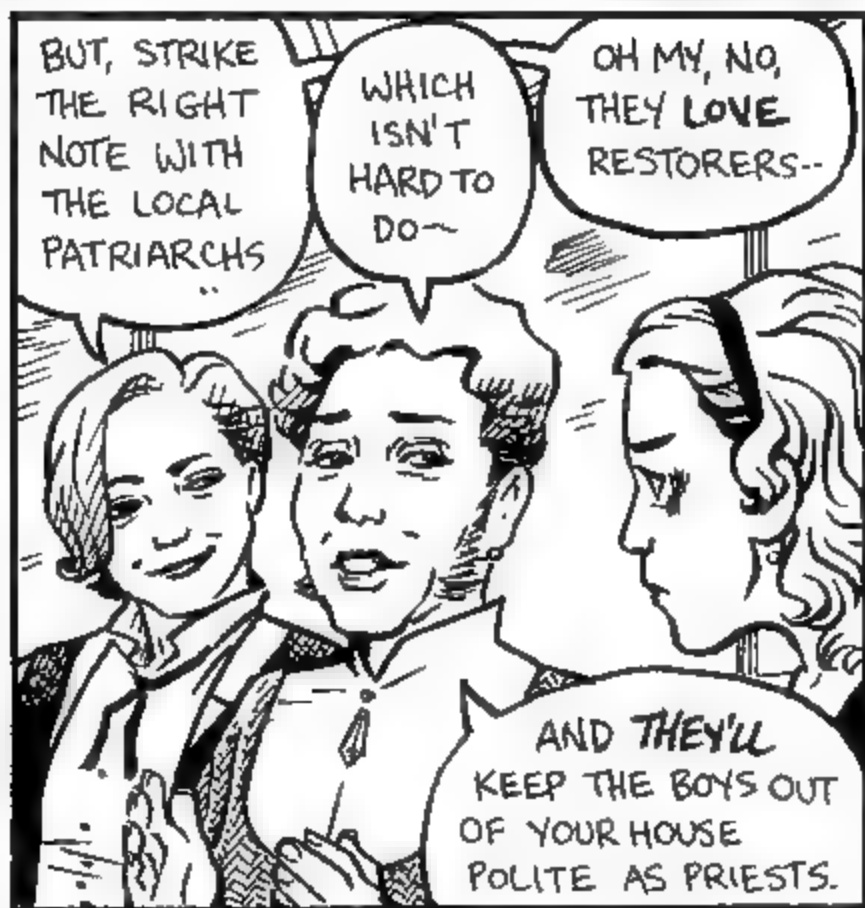


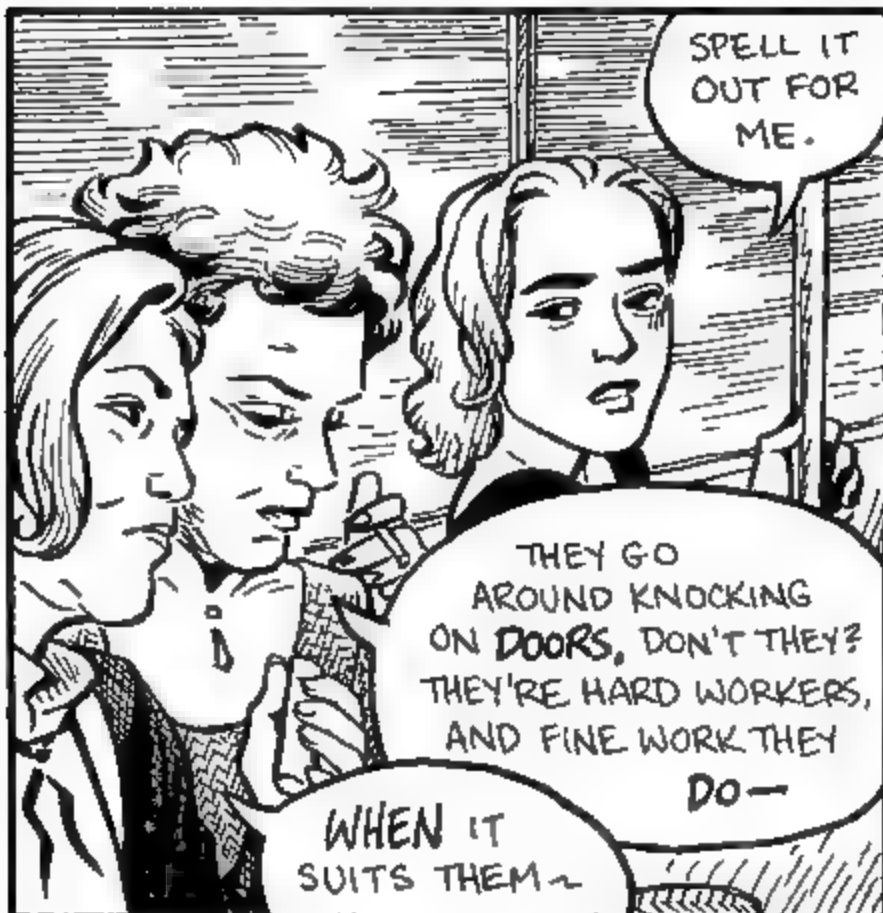
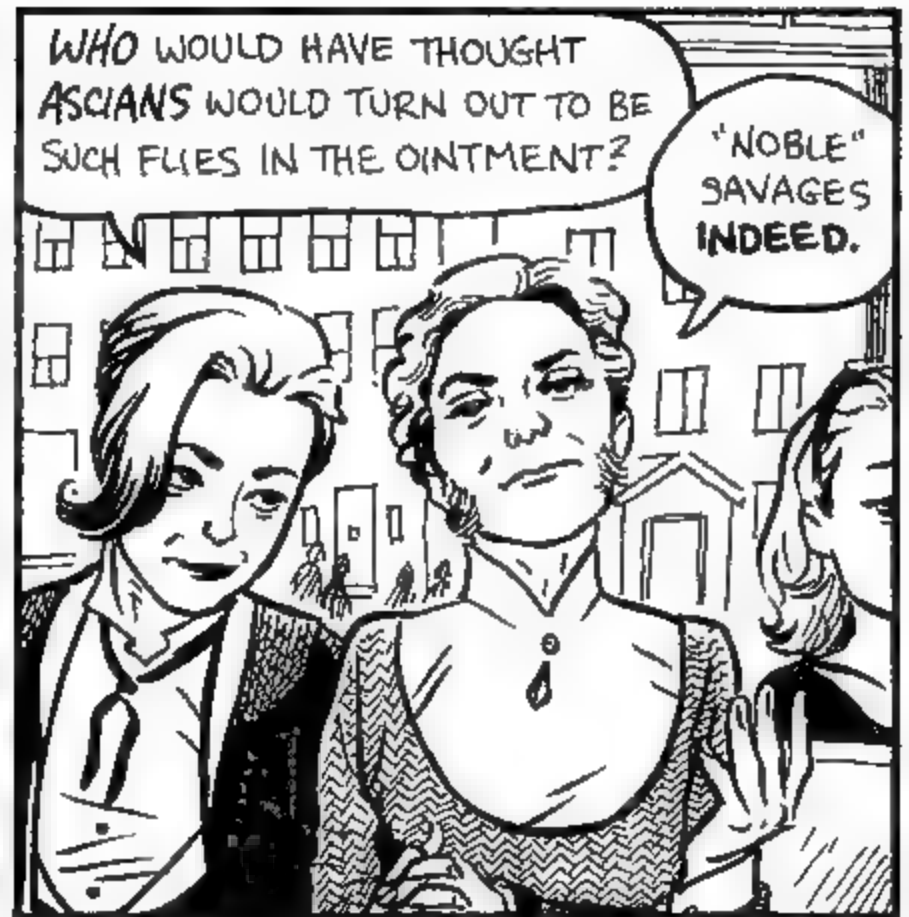








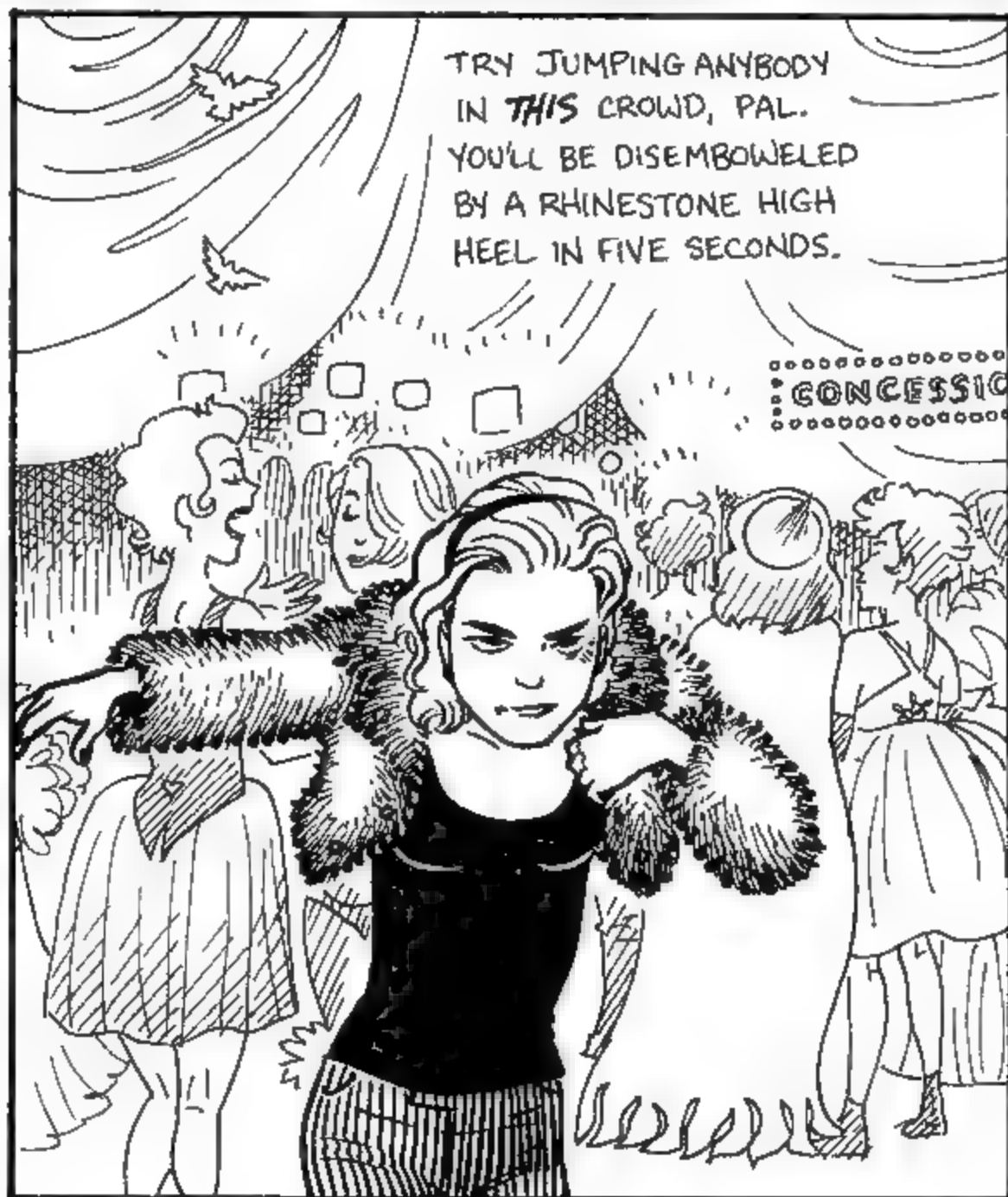


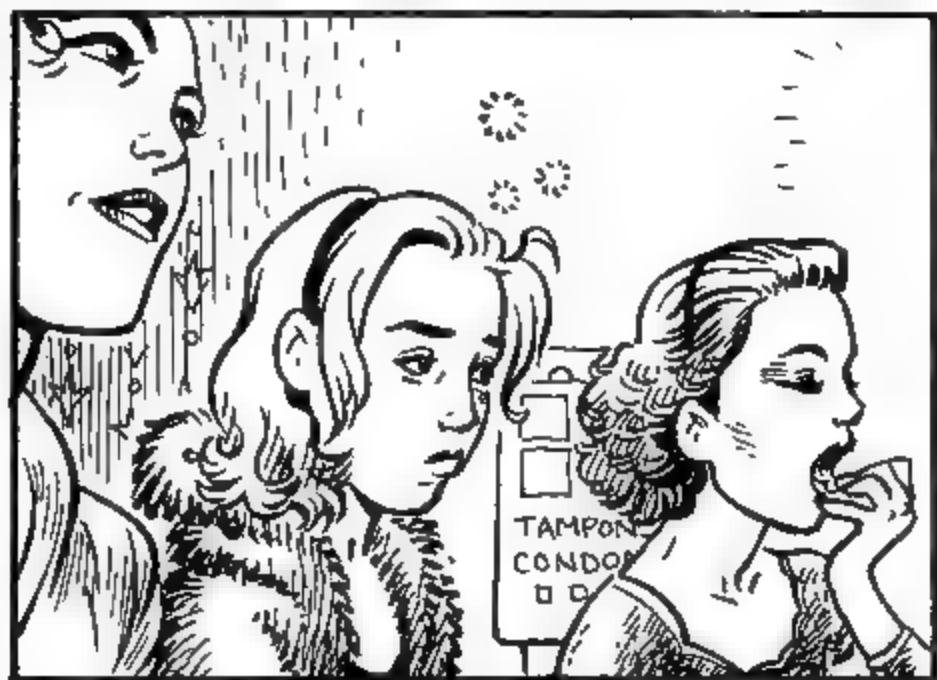






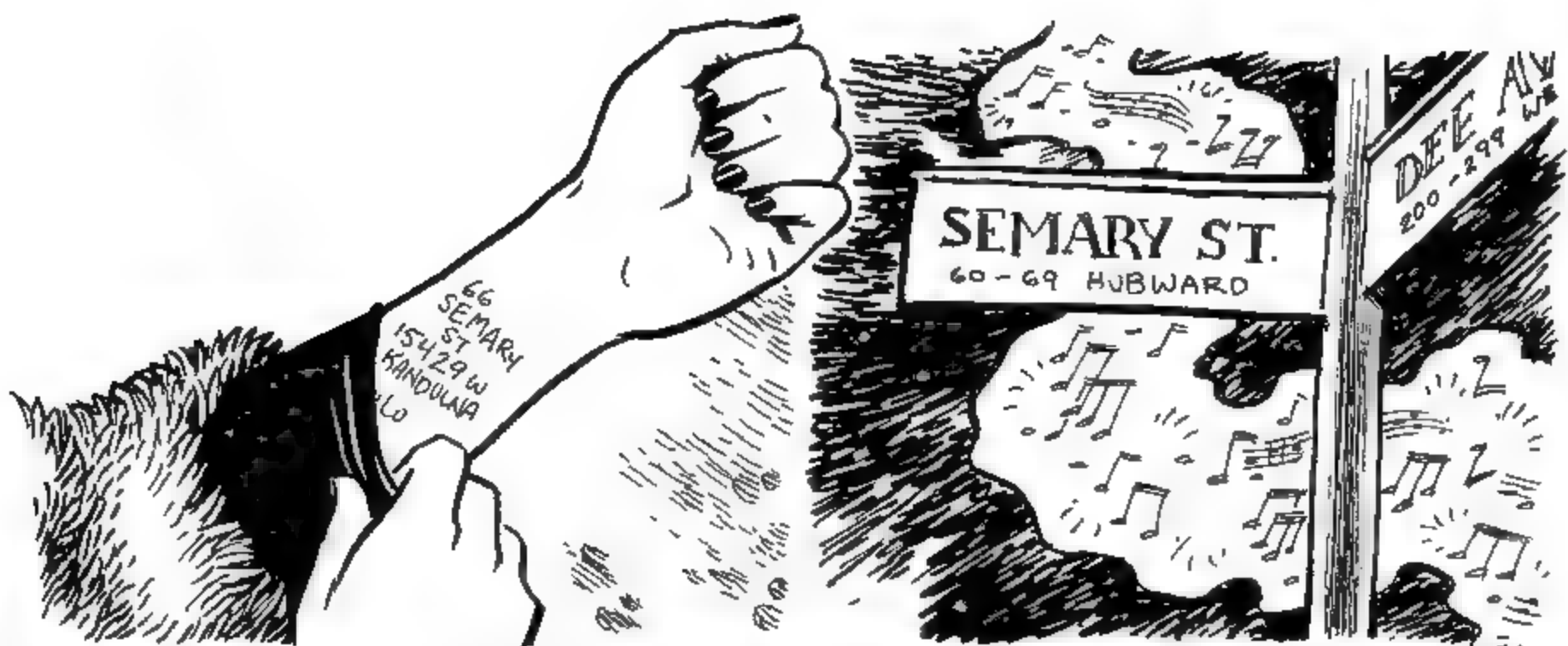
OKAY, SO HE **DIDN'T** GET OFF THE BUS WHEN I DID, HE MIGHT STILL GET OFF AT THE NEXT CORNER AND SNEAK UP BEHIND ME —

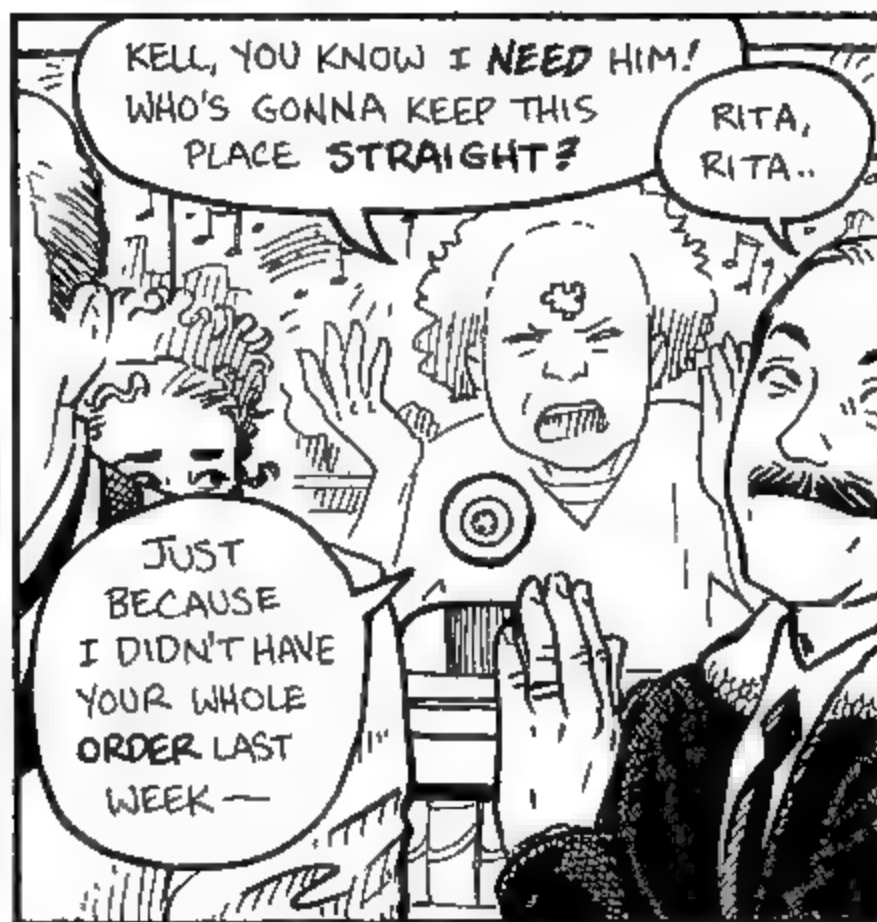
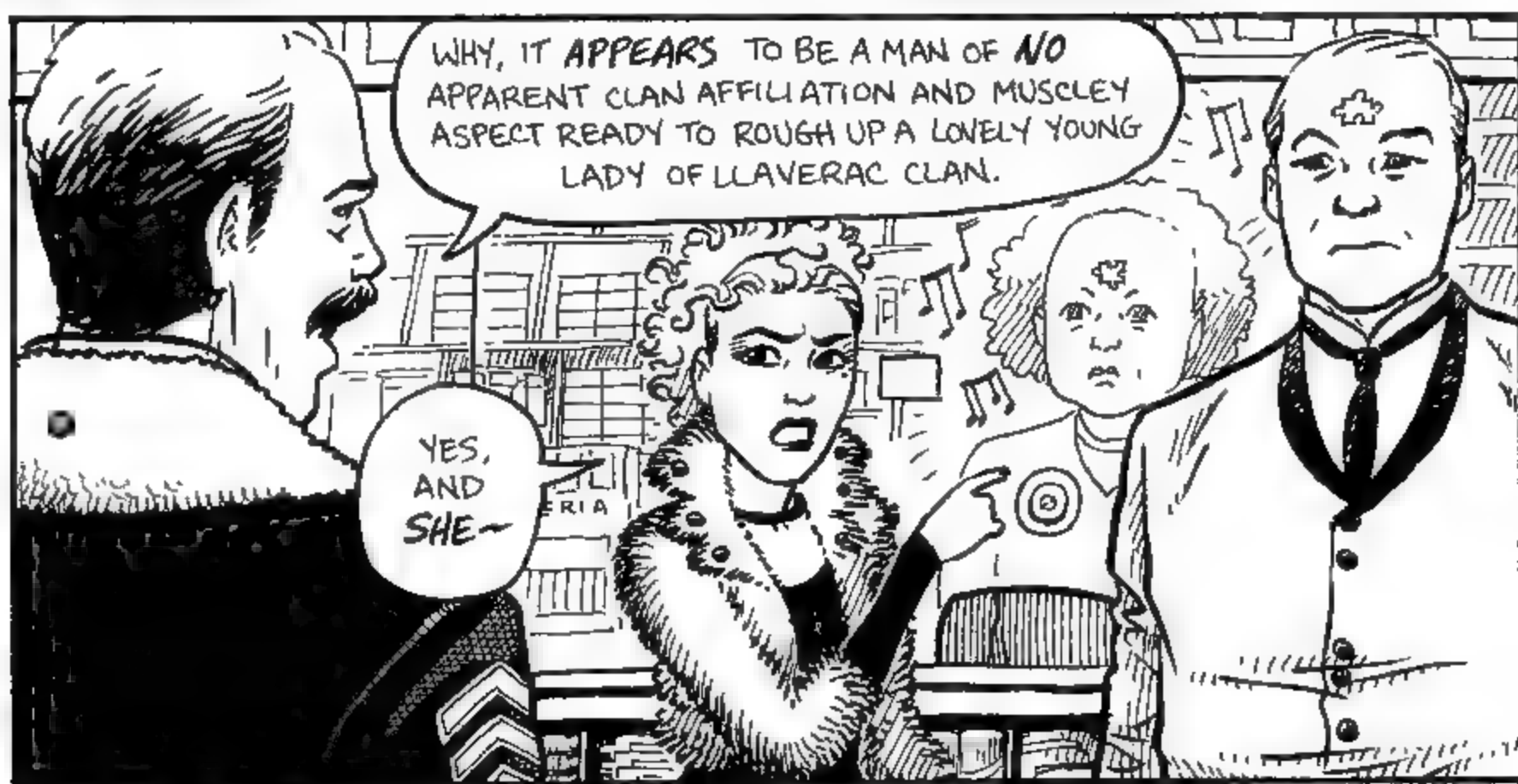


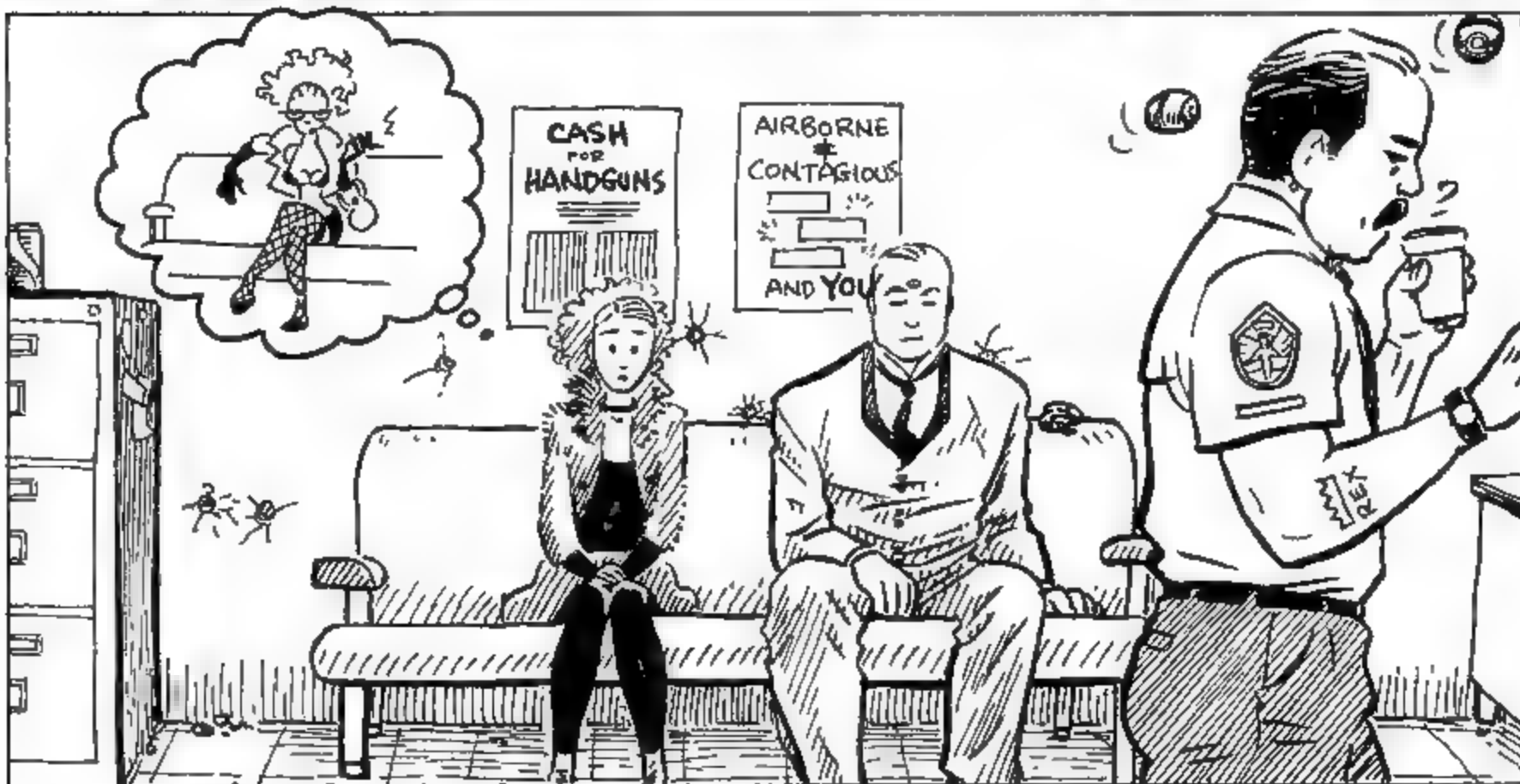




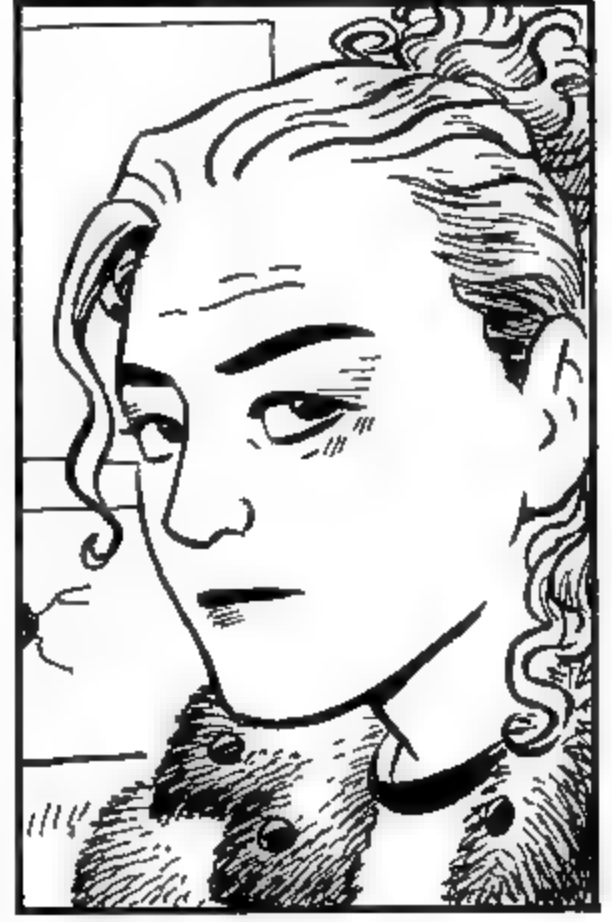














CAN YOU
BELIEVE
THAT??

ANYBODY ELSE, THE
COPS WOULD'VE AT LEAST
ESCORTED ME BACK TO,
WELL, PROBABLY BACK
TO GRANDAD'S, BUT —

BUT YOU'RE
NOT "ANYONE
ELSE," ARE
YOU?



"ANYBODY ELSE" COULDN'T
JUST HAVE STOMPED OUT
OF A POLICE STATION.



AAAND... LOOK
WHO IT IS. MY
LITTLE FRIEND.

MY LITTLE SHELL GAME
IS SO EFFECTIVE. HE
DOESN'T HAVE TO KNOW
ME FROM A HUNDRED
IDENTICAL LLAVERAC
GIRLS.

HE JUST HAS
TO GO TO ALL THE
PLACES HE ALREADY
KNOWS JAEGER
GOES AND WAIT
FOR ME TO SHOW.

BUT WHO THE HELL CARES ... HE'S OBVIOUSLY ONLY FOLLOWING **ME** TO FIND JAEGER **HIMSELF**, AND IF I DO FIND HIM, OH, I PITY **YOU**, PAL.



AND IT'S GONNA TAKE A COUPLE **POUNDS** OF MAKEUP TO MAKE ME LOOK GOOD FOR THE COMPETITION TOMORROW...



I JUST WANT MY BALLOON, I MEAN MY KNIGHTHOOD, AND GO **HOME**...

KNIGHTHOOD?
HAVEN'T YOU **HEARD?**



HEARD WHUT?

GRAND DUCHESS BLOOM!



DEAD!

STROKED OUT! D.O.A.!



I MEAN, THERE HAS TO BE AN INQUEST AND ALL, BUT SHE WAS **OLD**! YOU **KNOW** THEY'LL PASS DOWN HER TITLE AT THE COMPETITION!







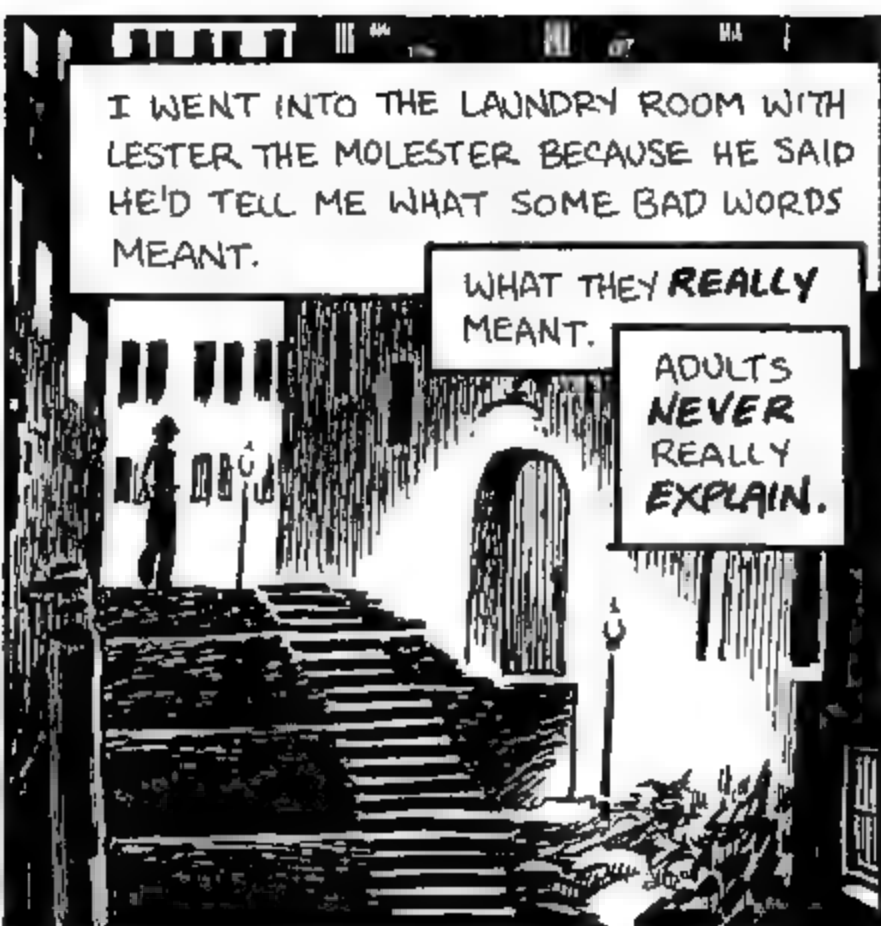
IF JAEGER WAS HERE, HE'D KNOW WHAT TO DO. HOW TO ACT. DRUGWHORE OR POLICE CHIEF, HE'D KNOW WHAT TO SAY. HE'D BE SAFE, EVEN WITHOUT HAVING TO FIGHT. I WANT TO BE LIKE THAT.





I KNOW, I KNOW
I CAN'T BLAME MY-
SELF FOR SOMETHING
I DID WHEN I WAS
EIGHT, BUT ~

PEOPLE
DON'T
CHANGE.



I WENT INTO THE LAUNDRY ROOM WITH
LESTER THE MOLESTER BECAUSE HE SAID
HE'D TELL ME WHAT SOME BAD WORDS
MEANT.

WHAT THEY **REALLY**
MEANT.

ADULTS
NEVER
REALLY
EXPLAIN.



I KNEW HE WAS BAD.

I KNEW HE WOULD HURT ME.

I DIDN'T RUN.

I DIDN'T FIGHT.



KID OR NOT, I KNEW. I DID.

I JUST DIDN'T ACT.



I DRIFTED.

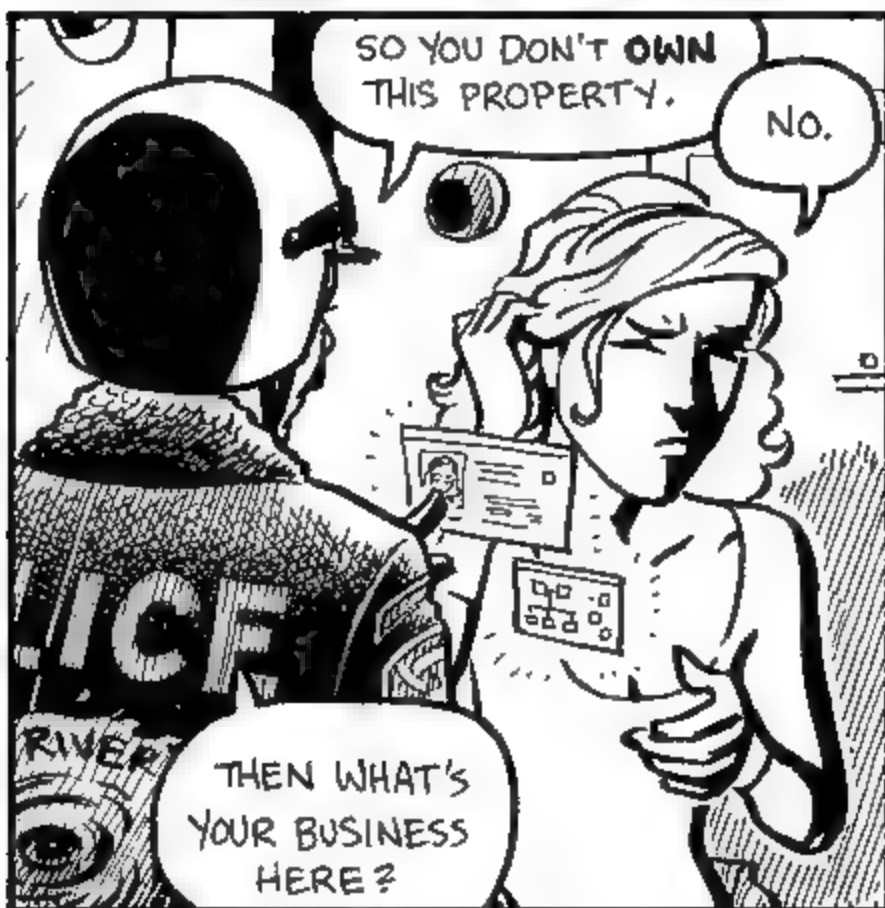
66 SEMARY
15429
KANDOLNA
DRITSCHLO
039-25



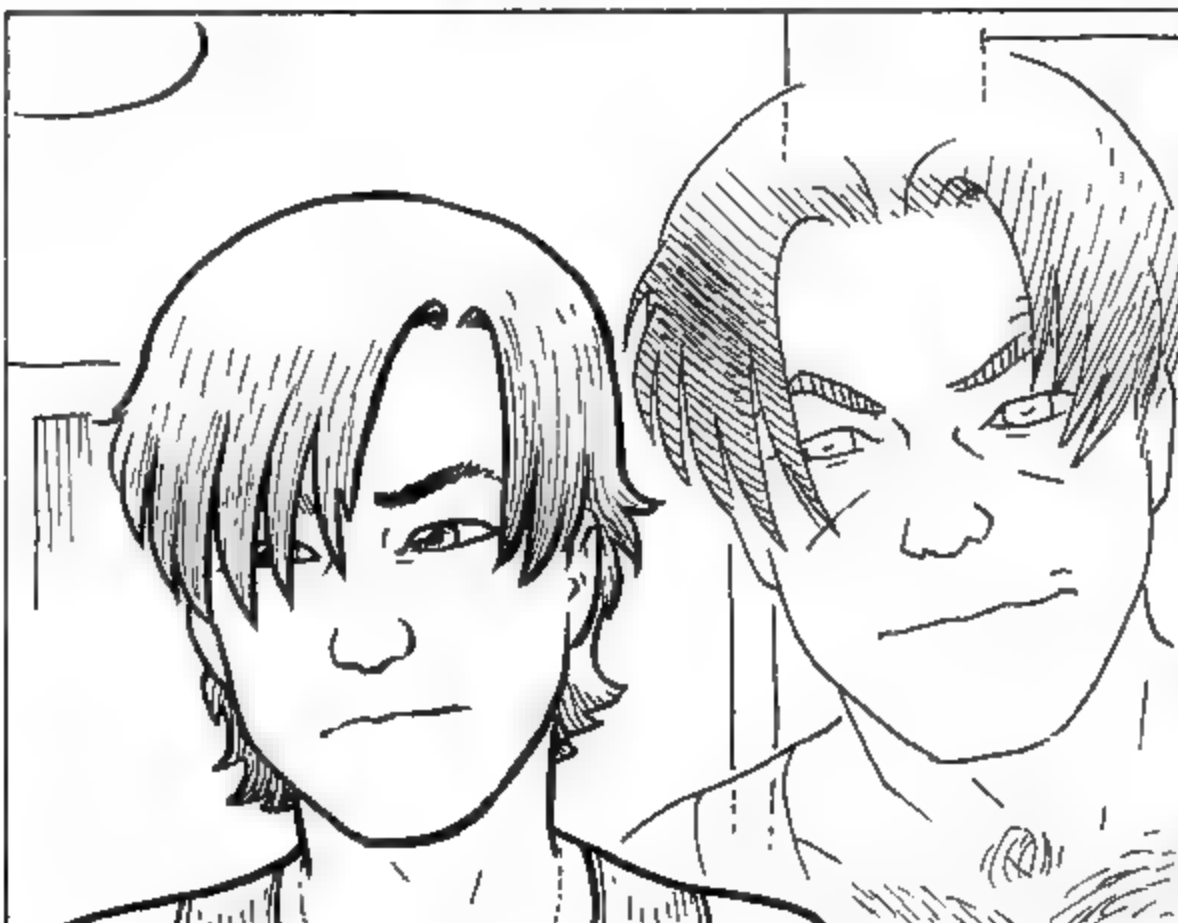
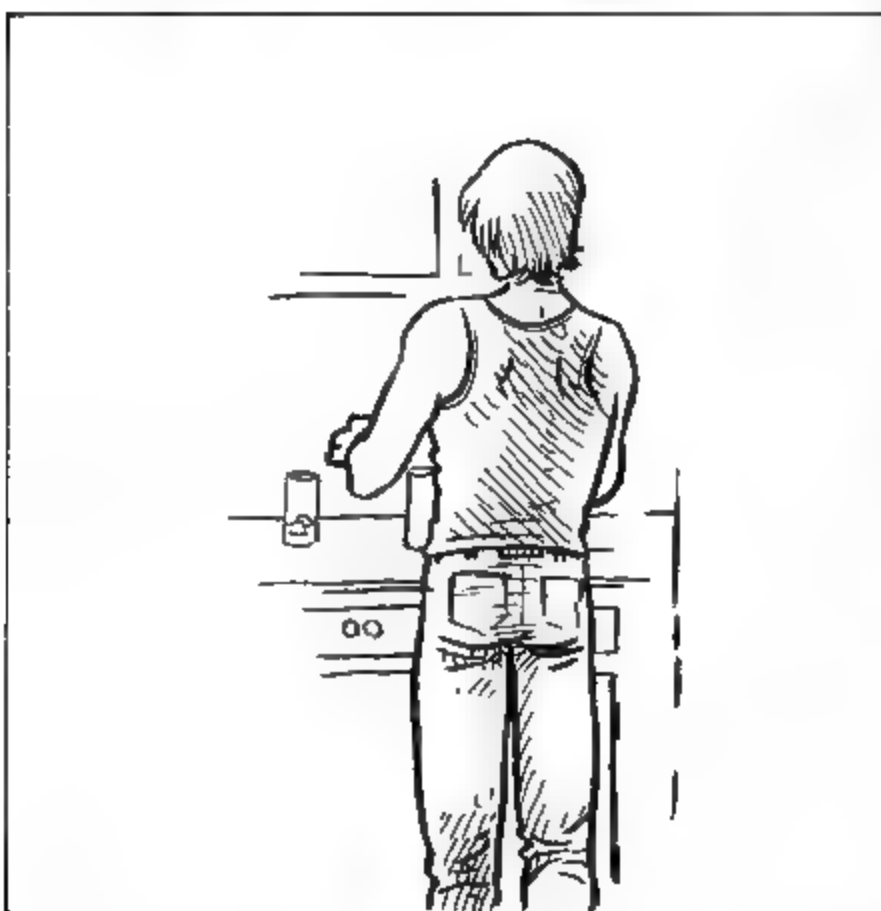
I NEVER JUMP
WHEN I SHOULD.

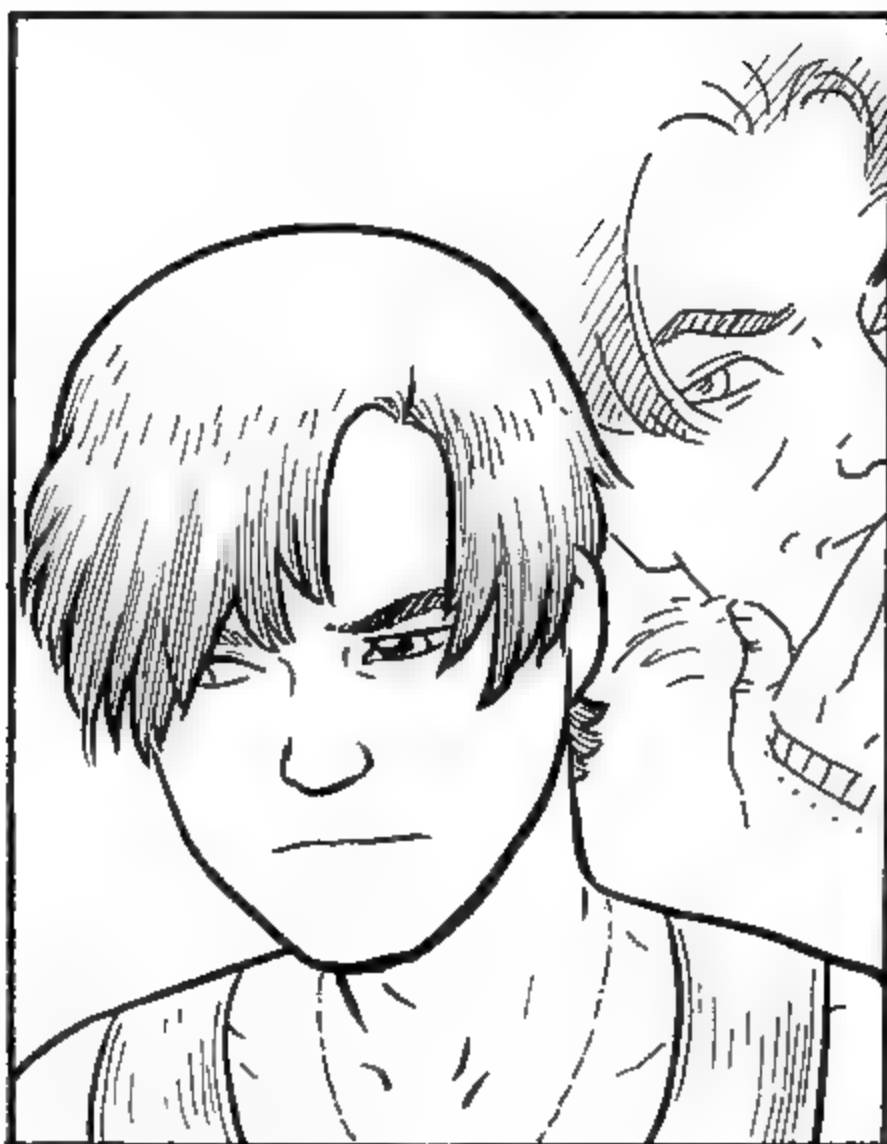


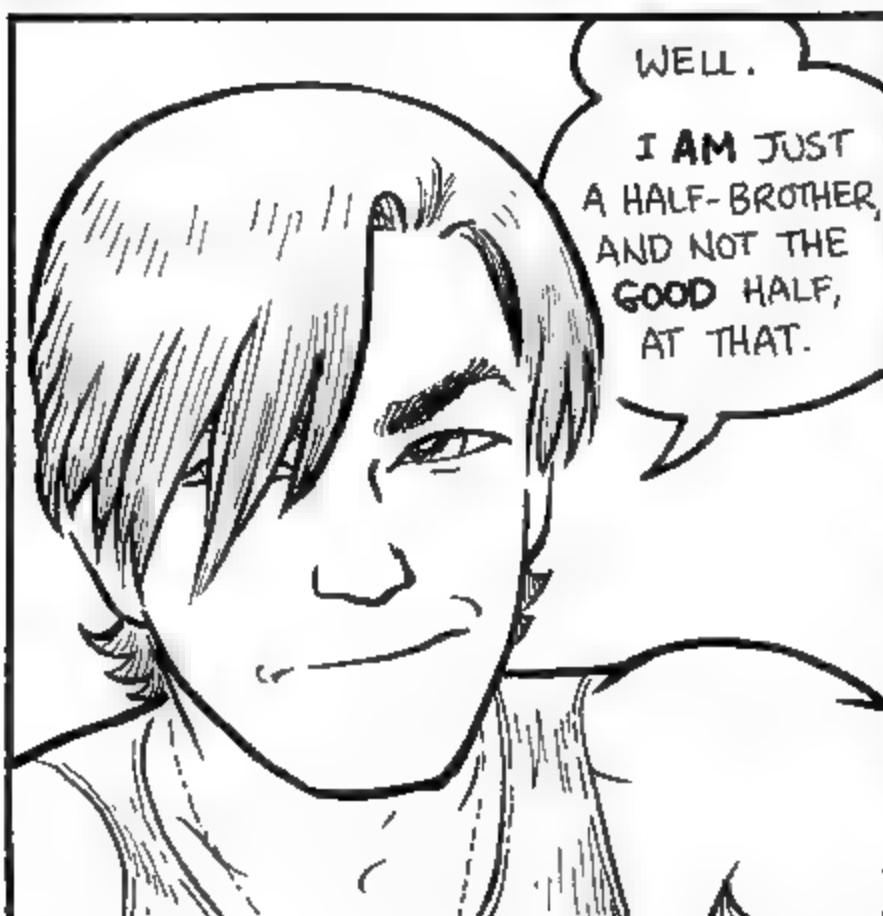
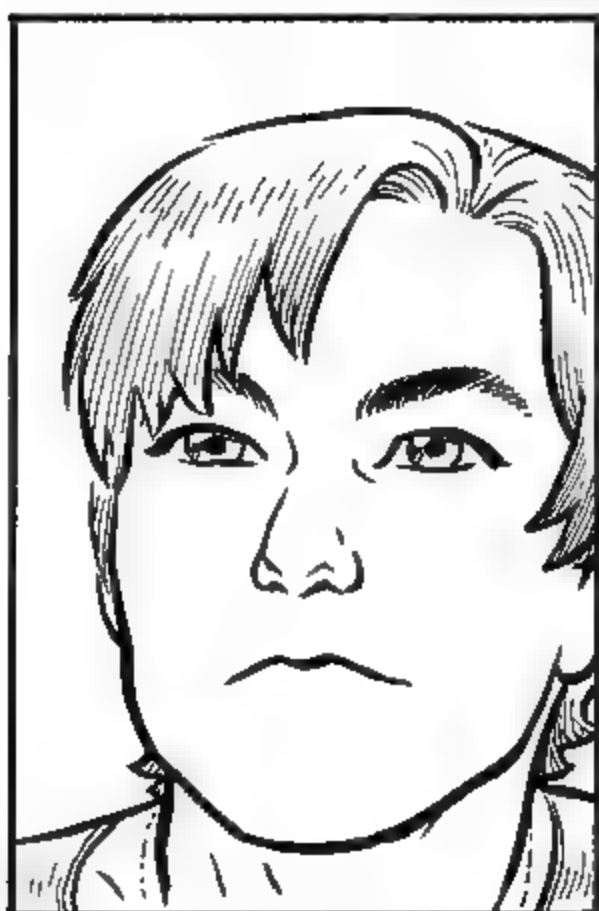
AND I AM ALWAYS
GONNA BE THIS WAY

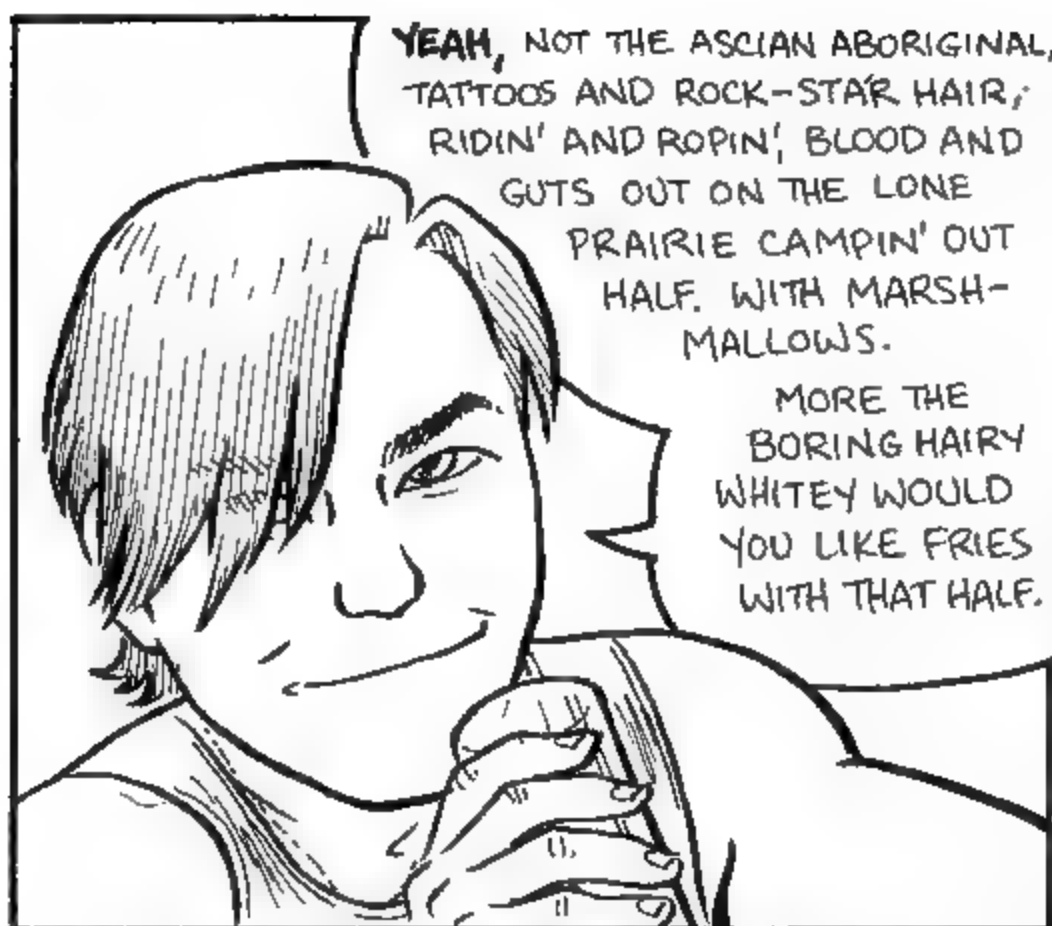












YEAH, NOT THE ASCIAN ABORIGINAL,
TATTOOS AND ROCK-STAR HAIR;
RIDIN' AND ROPIN', BLOOD AND
GUTS OUT ON THE LONE
PRAIRIE CAMPIN' OUT
HALF. WITH MARSH-
MALLOWS.

MORE THE
BORING HAIRY
WHITEY WOULD
YOU LIKE FRIES
WITH THAT HALF.



HEH...

I GUESS I'M THE
CRAZY BULLSHIT LIFE-
STYLES OF THE WEIRD
AND UPPER-CLASS HALF,
SORT OF..



I MEAN, NOT
THAT WE'RE REAL
FAMILY, BUT~

OH YEAH,
YOU'RE A BIG
TIME ULAVERAC,
THAT'S
RIGHT.

SHIT, I MUSTA SEEN
YOU ON THE TUBE A
MILLION TIMES THIS
WEEK, RIGHT?
THE BEAUTY
CONTEST CAT
SHOW.



YEAH.

THE
CAT
SHOW.



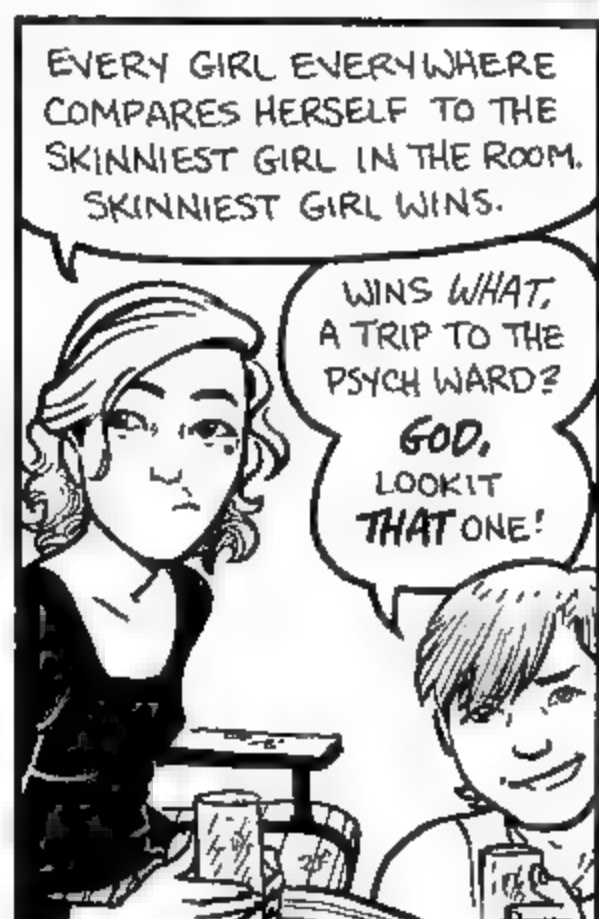
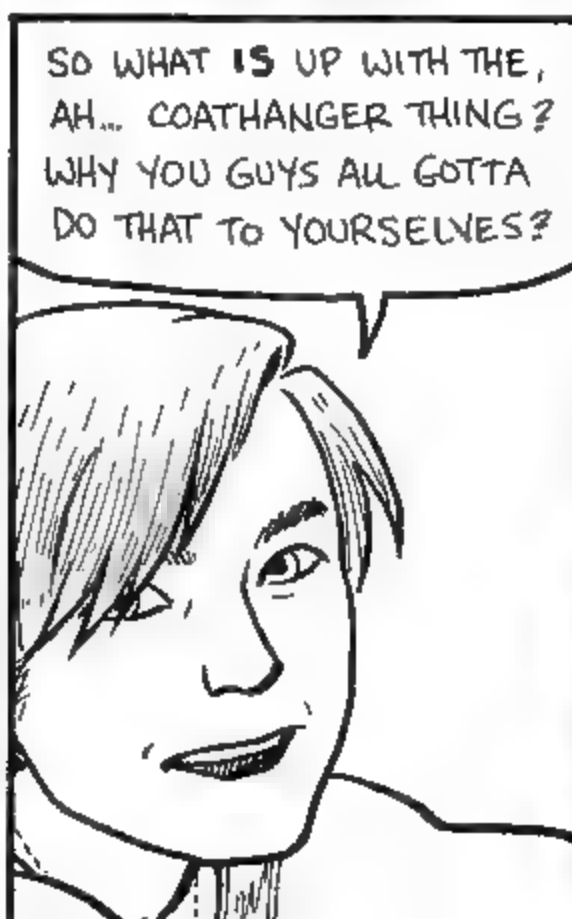
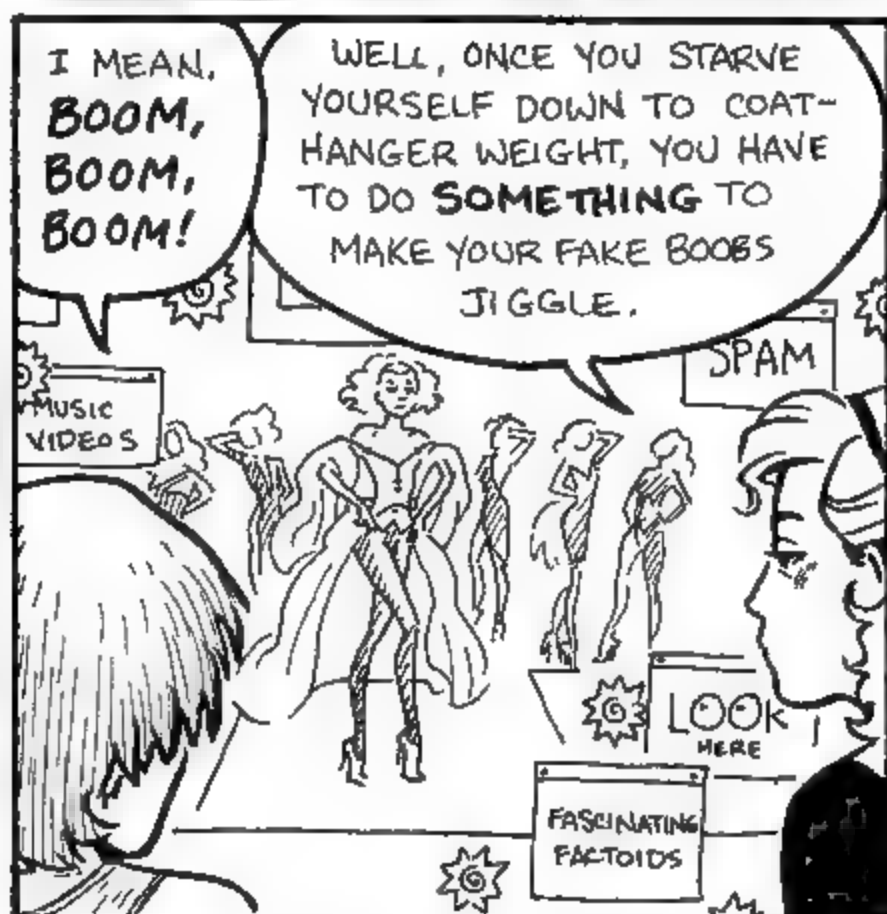
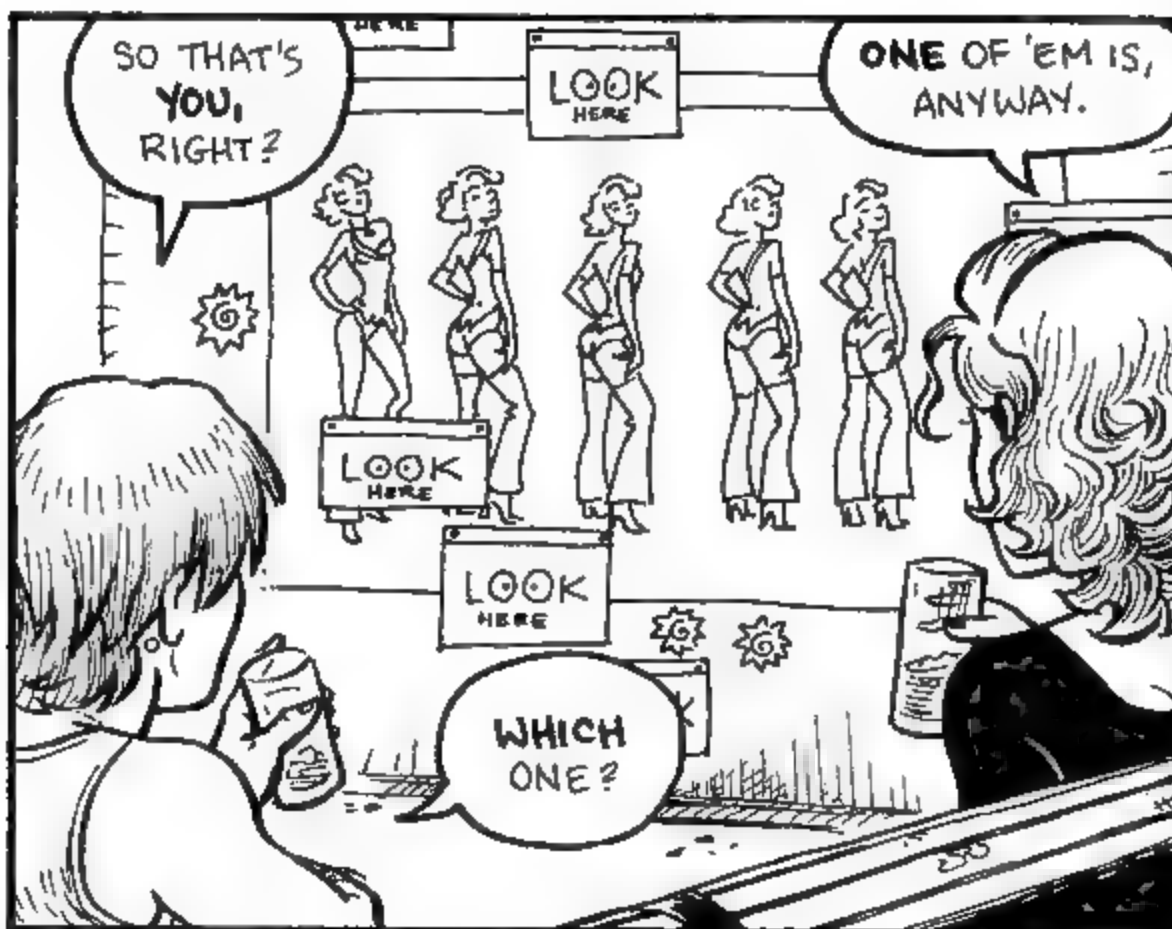
HEY, I'M SORRY, THAT'S
WHAT EVERY BODY
CALLS IT AROUND
HERE. BUT~

NO, NO, IT
IS KINDA~
WELL~



PRETTY BATSHIT
INSANE, REALLY~

OH GOD, DON'T TURN
ON THE TV, PLEASE
~AUGHH!





DO YOU GET TO **STOP**
DOING THAT AFTER YOU
WIN?

DOUBT
IT.

WHAT
HAPPENS IF
YOU **DON'T**
WIN?



I'LL BE A
CULL, LIKE MY
SISTERS.

I'LL BE
SOMEBODY'S
MISTRESS.
IF I'M
LUCKY.



I MET A GIRL
TONIGHT, NAMED
PSYKHE. SHE'S A CULL.
BOTH HER PARENTS
WERE CULLS, SO SHE
REALLY NEVER HAD
A CHANCE.

IT'LL BE THE
SAME FOR ME IF
I DON'T MAKE
THE CUT.

PSYKHE'S HOPING
THAT I MAKE IT AND
IF I DO, I'LL, WELL.
I'LL LIKE HER. THAT'S
MOST LIKELY WHAT
SHE'S HOPING FOR.

IF I WANT A **CAREER**,
I'LL HAVE TO FIND SOME-
BODY TO PAY MY WAY
THROUGH SCHOOL. THAT
MEANS SNUGGLE UP TO
SOMEBODY.

OR ENTER
SERVICE. SIGN
AN INDENTURE
AND BE SOME-
BODY'S PROPERTY.



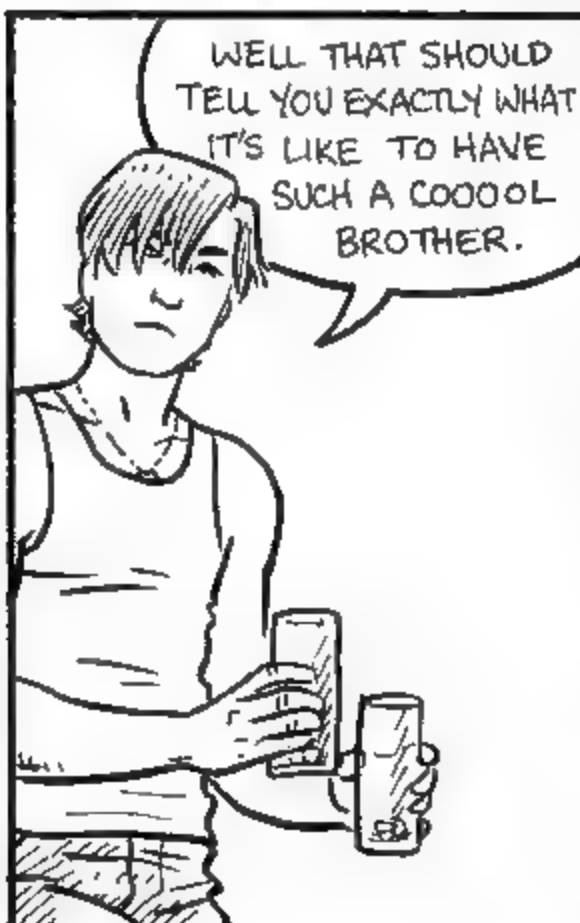
CAN'T YOU JUST GO
HOME? YOUR FAMILY'S
GOT MONEY, RIGHT?

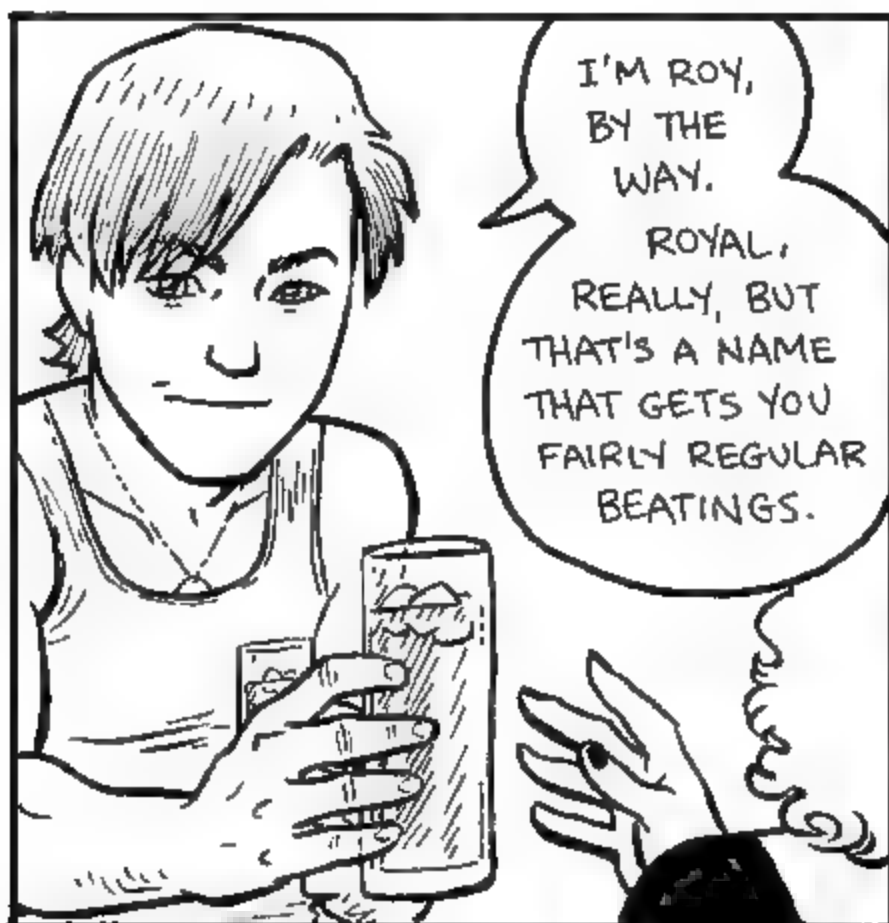
NNNGH.



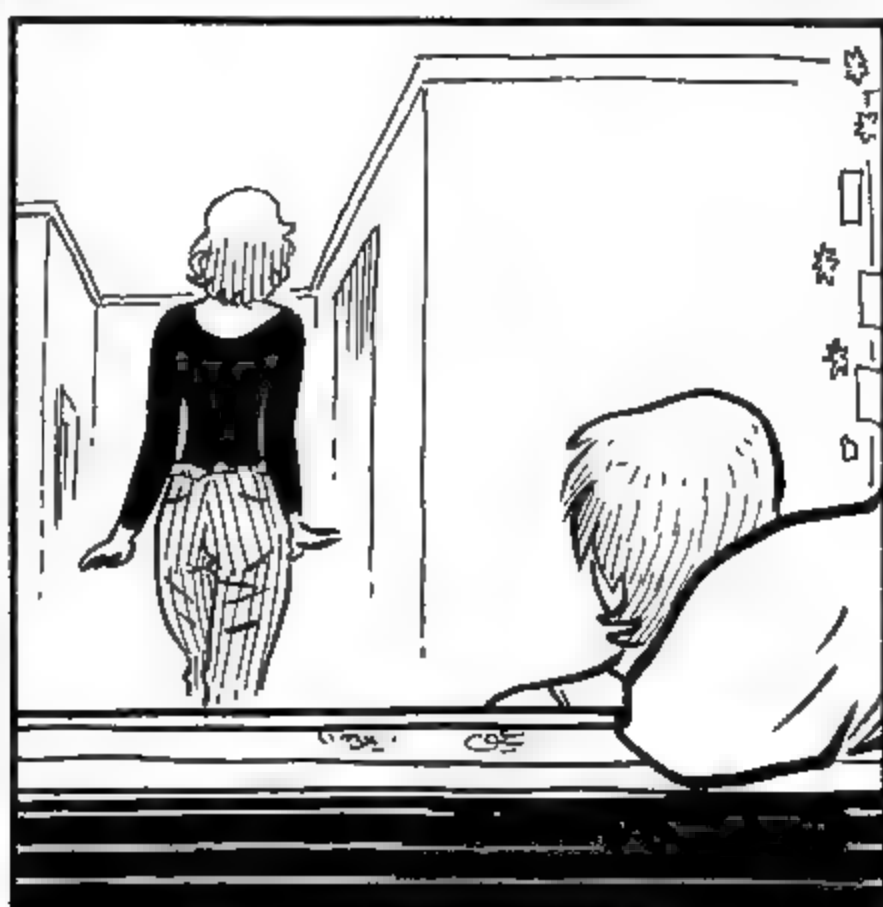
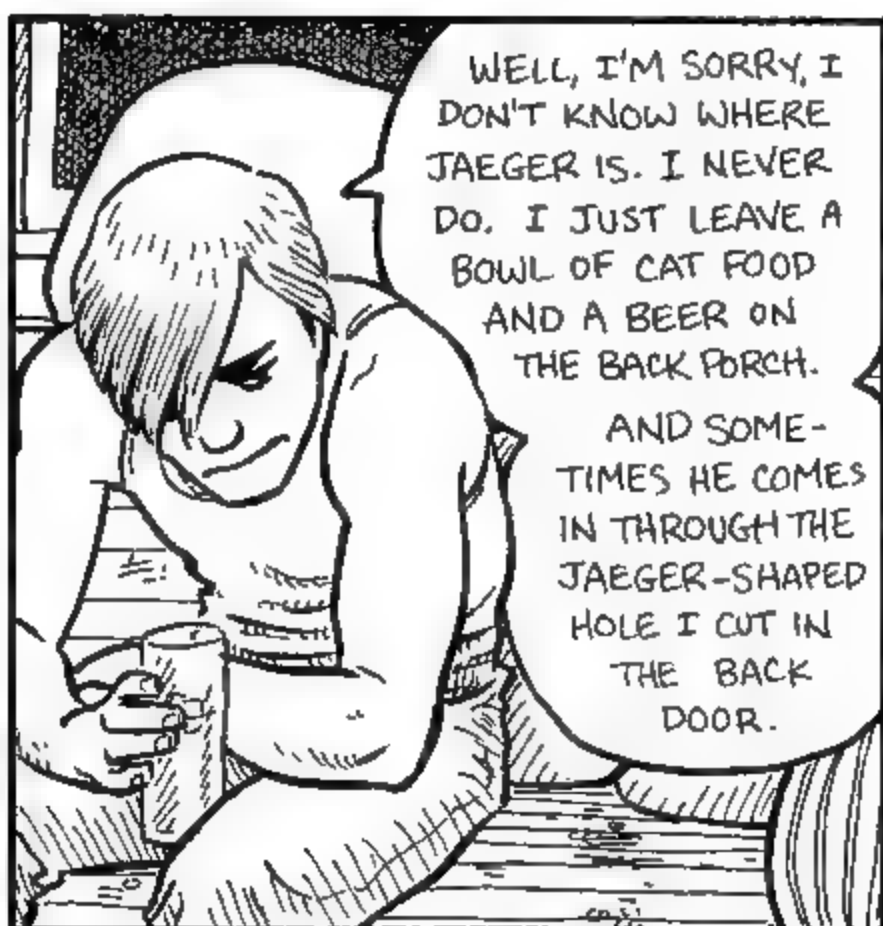
YEAH, OKAY, BAD IDEA.
BUT YOU COULD ALWAYS
GET A JOB DOWN HERE
WITH THE REST OF US.

YEAH.
BE **EMPLOYED**
BY SOMEBODY'S
PROPERTY.

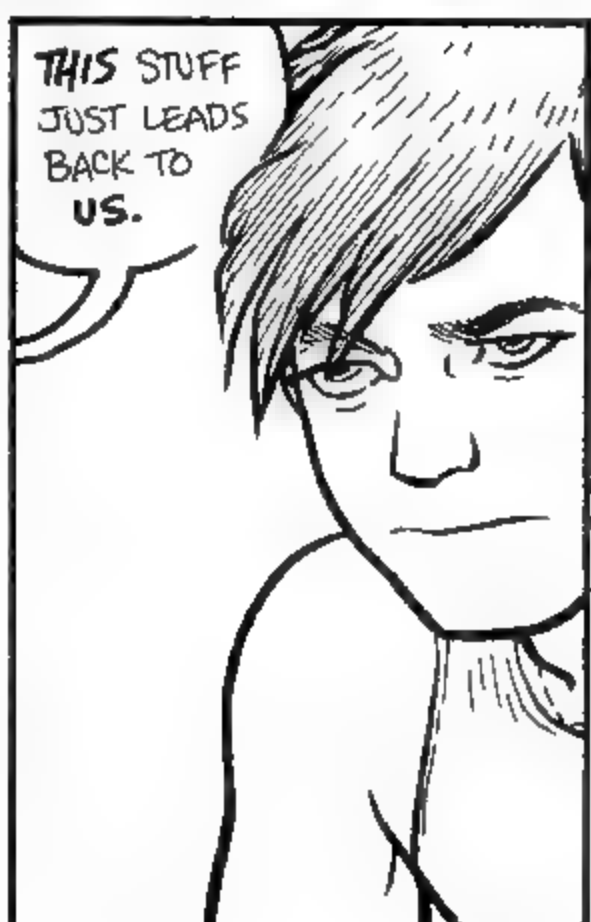
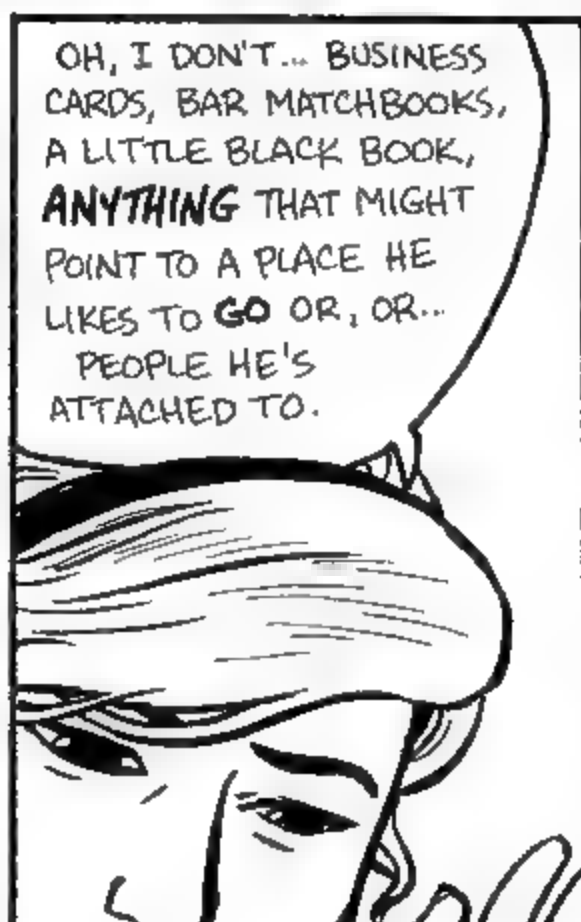
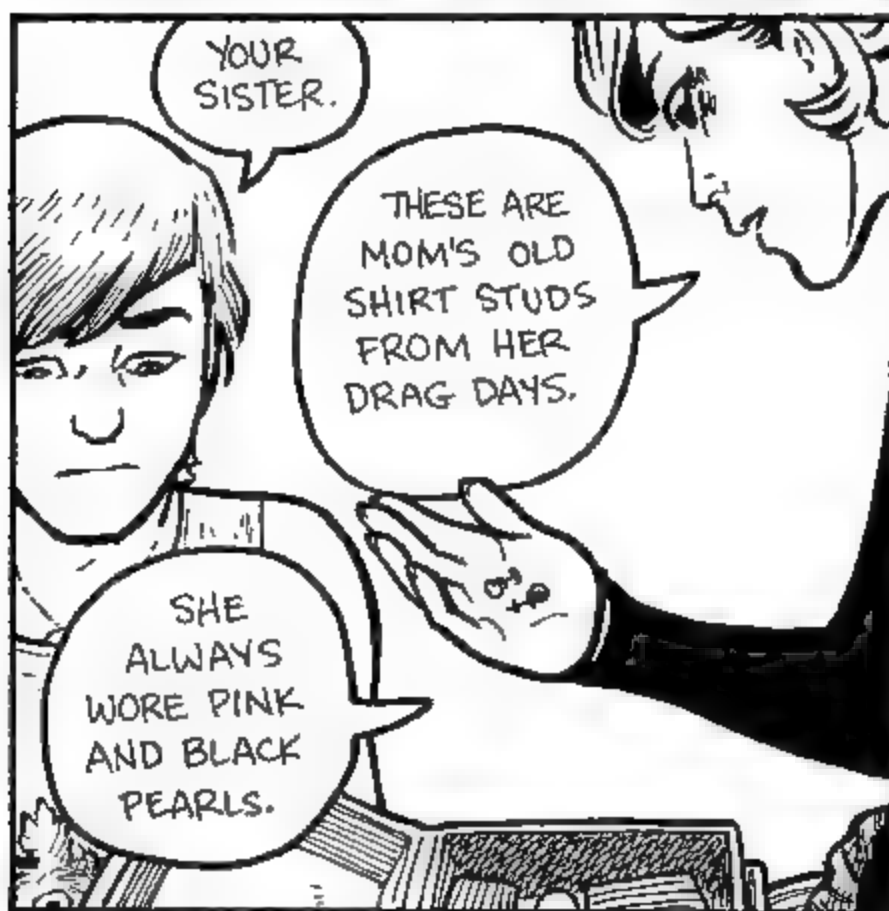


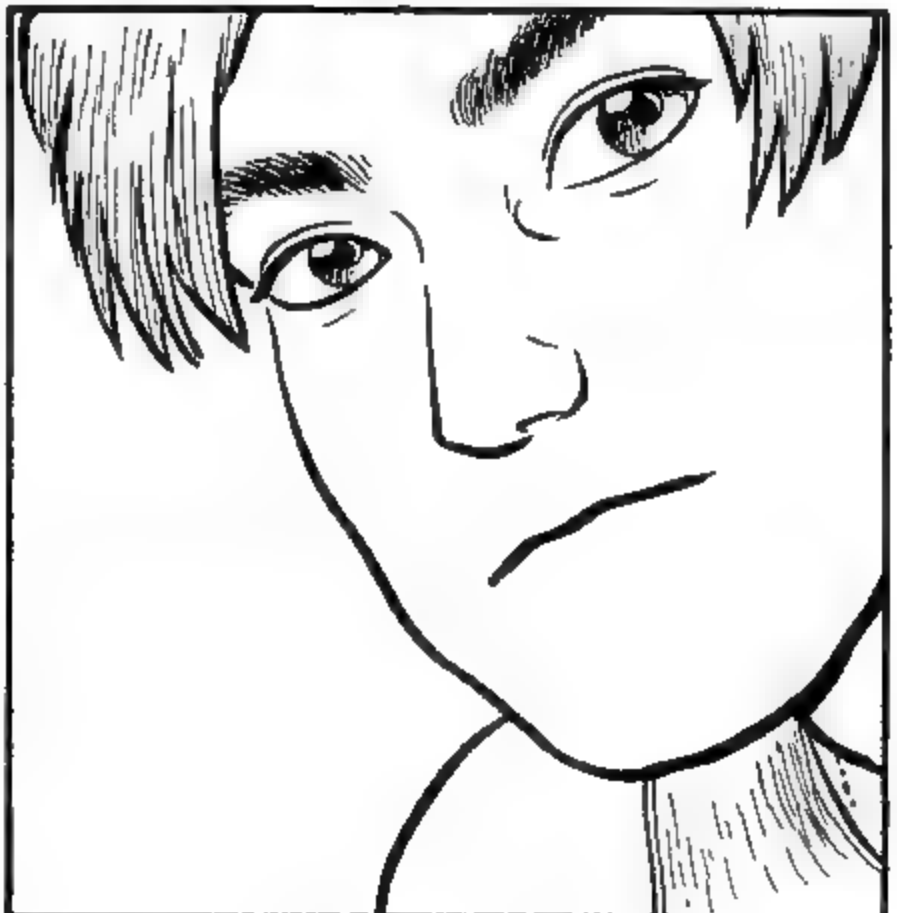
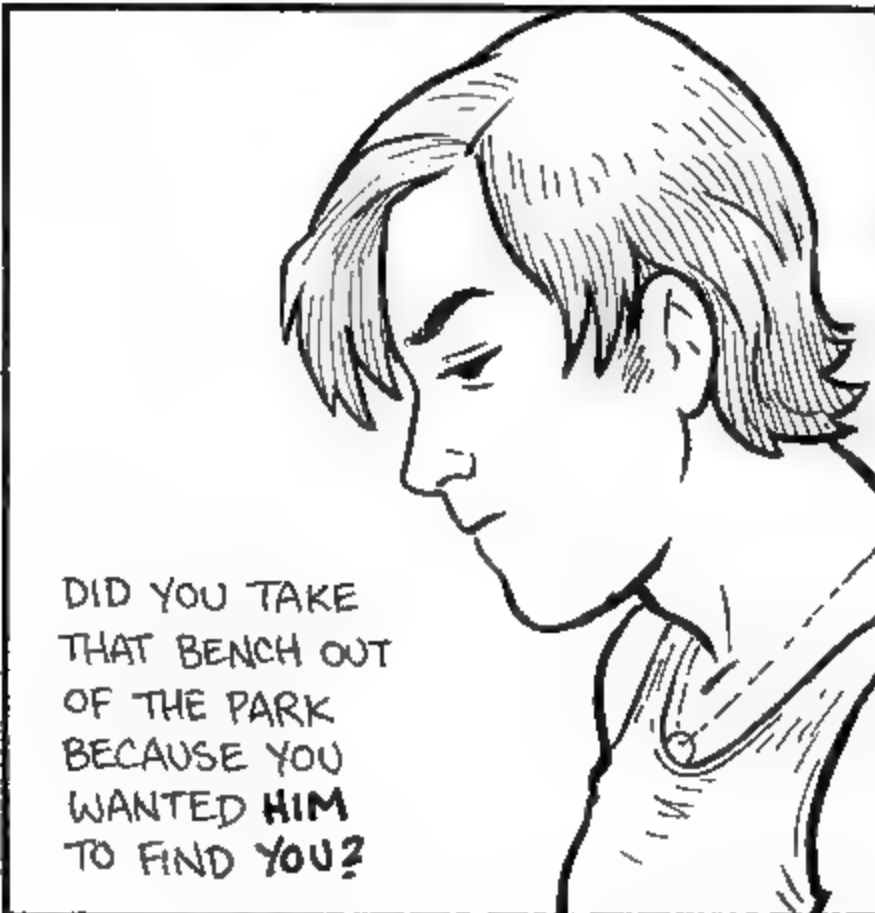
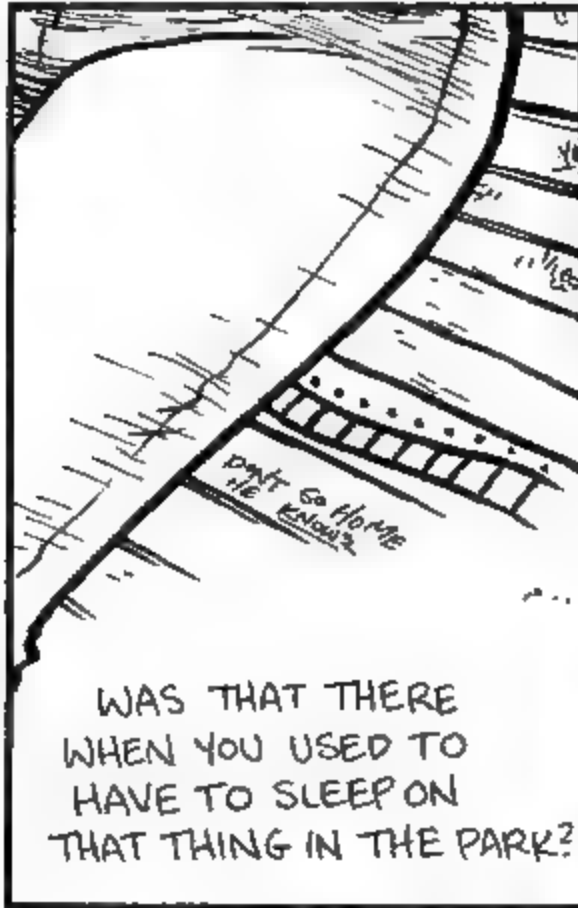
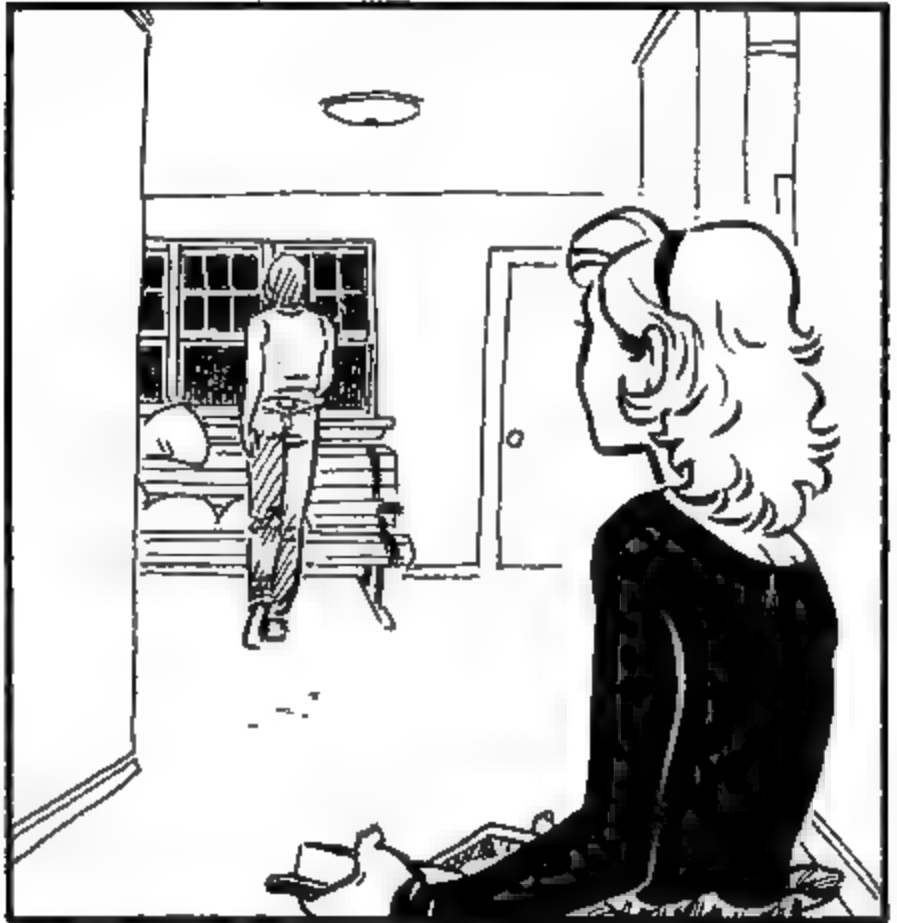


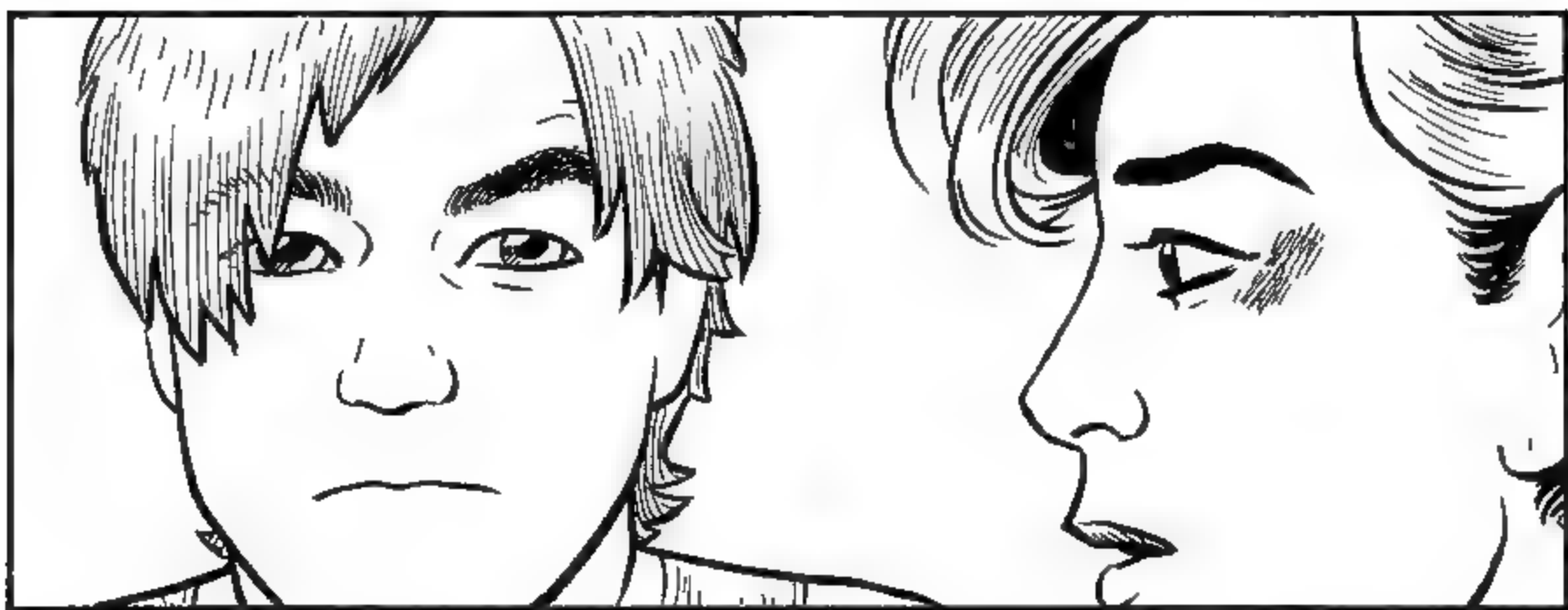




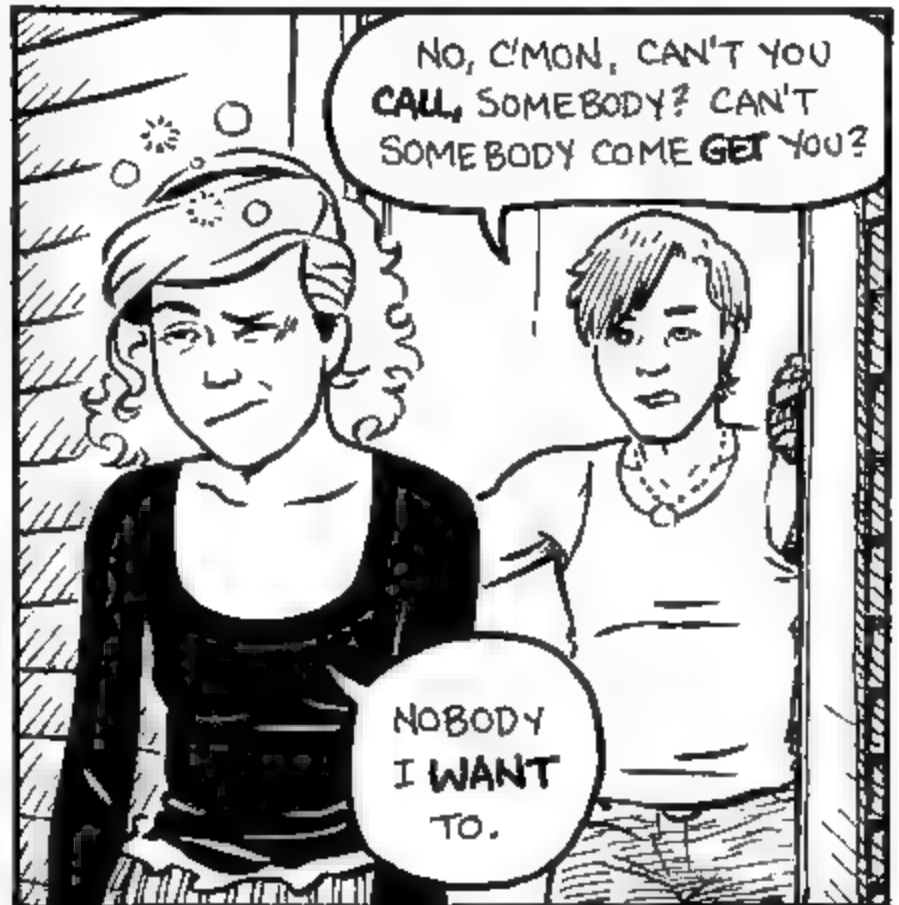




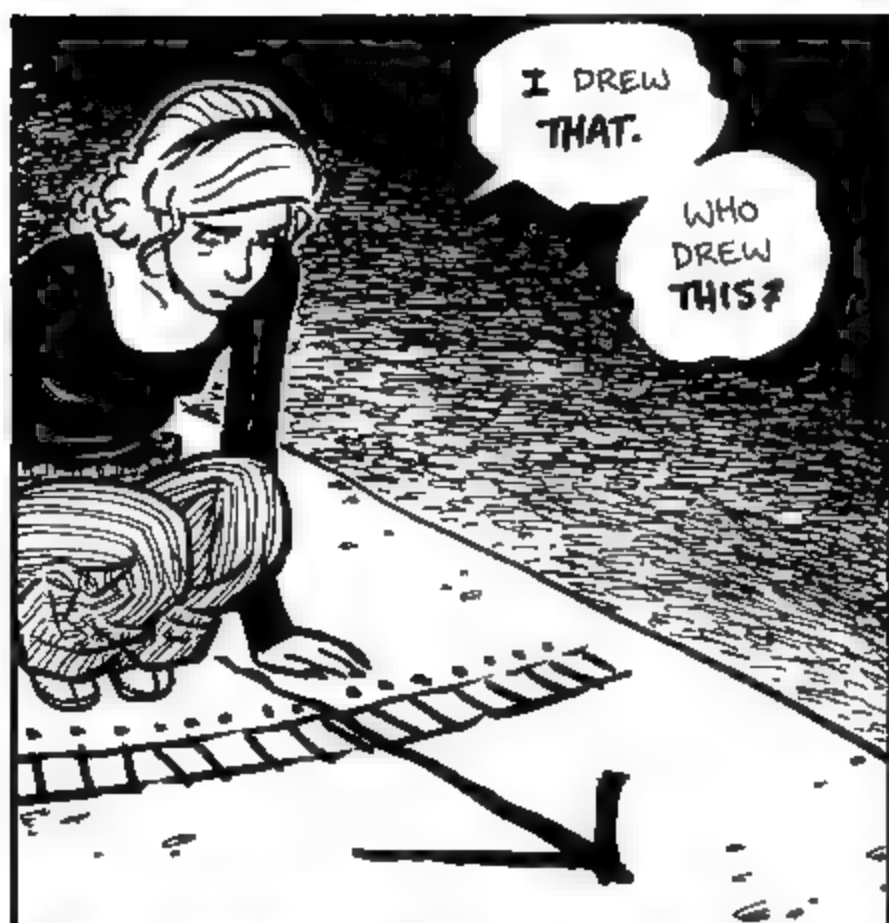
















I GIVE UP.



I SHOULD HAVE REALIZED.



IT'S HIS JOB, RIGHT?




JAEGER'S JOB.
FINDING THINGS
FOR PEOPLE.
FINDING PEOPLE
FOR THINGS.




EITHER WAY, HE'D
MAKE IT VERY EASY
FOR PEOPLE TO
FIND HIM.

EASY, FOR PEOPLE
WHO DON'T USE
THE PHONE BOOK.

FOR WHOM
THINGS ARE
WRITTEN ON
THE STREET.




HE'S NOT
IN TOWN.



HE WOULD HAVE
HEARD I WAS
LOOKING FOR HIM.

SOMEONE WOULD
HAVE TOLD HIM.

FOR MONEY,
OR LOYALTY,
OR JUST TO
BE USEFUL TO
ANOTHER OLD
STREET MONSTER
LIKE JAEGER.

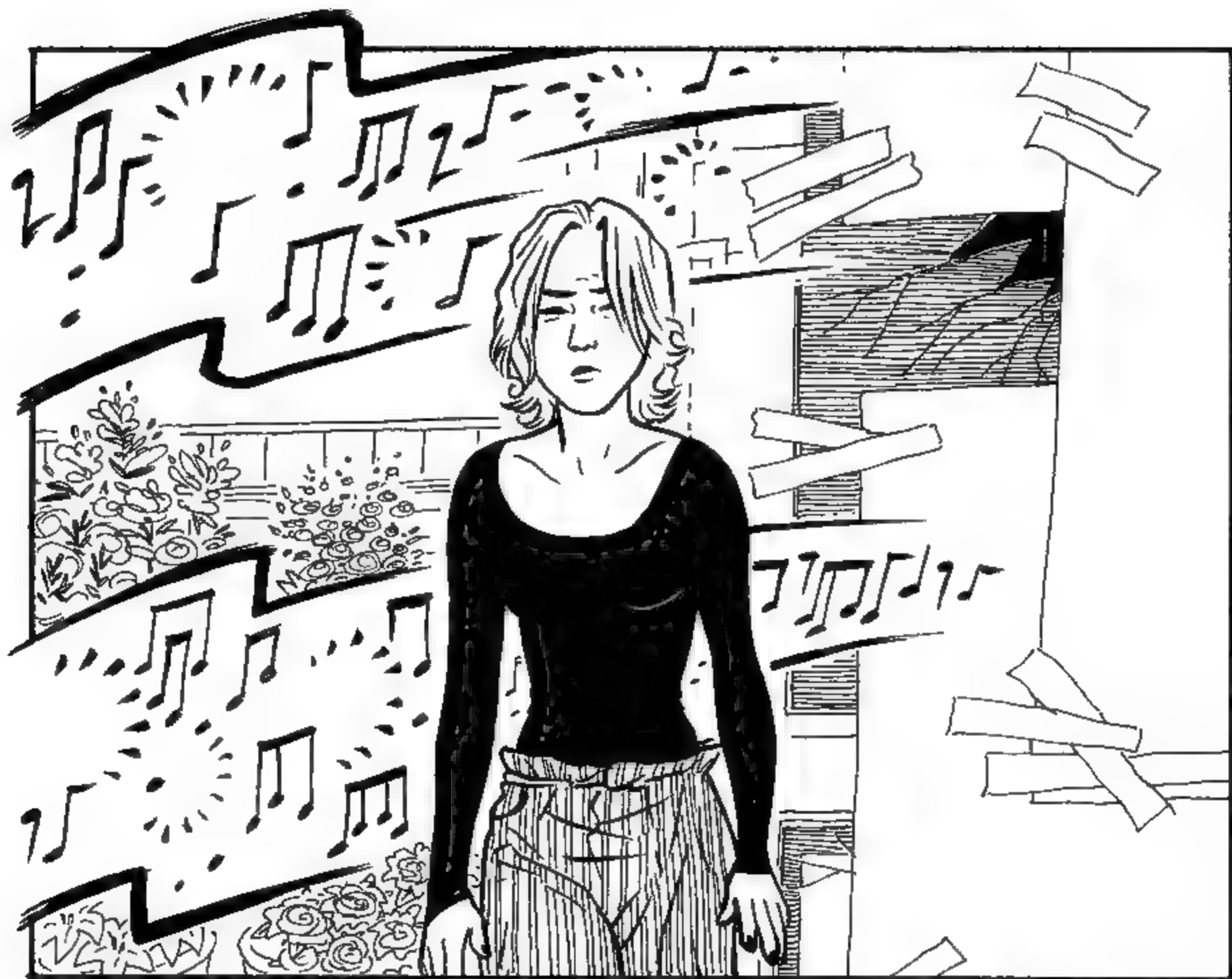


HE'S JUST
NOT HERE.

I'M NOT
GOING TO
FIND HIM.







DRUMS, DRUMS
THAT MAKE MY
HEART RACE TO
CATCH UP



ROASTING MEAT AND ONIONS
AND SOMETHING SHARP LIKE
FUCK I'M HUNGRY.

BURNY SMELL OF WHISKEY
AND WOODSMOKE. OH, IT'S
HIM. IT SMELLS LIKE HIM.

BUT HE'S
NOT HERE.

I KNOW
THAT.

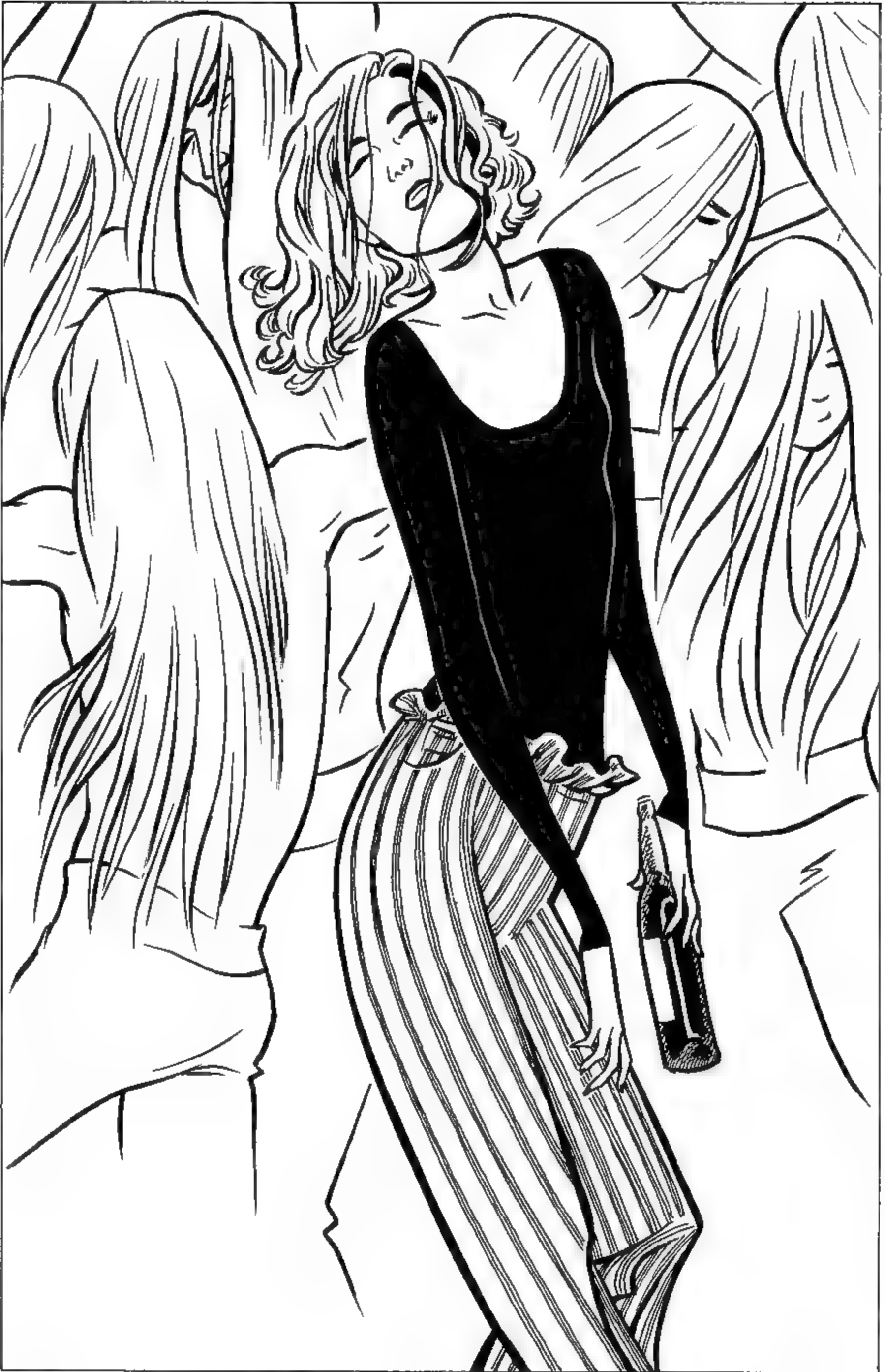


OH.



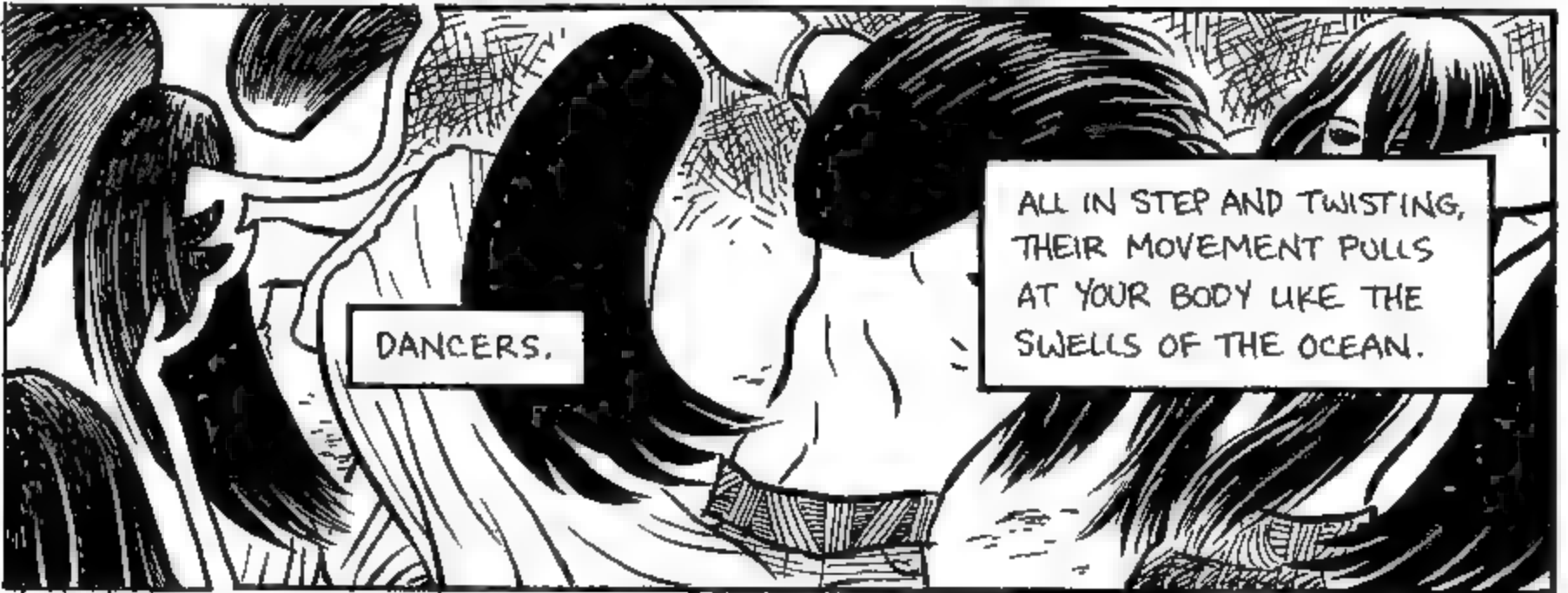


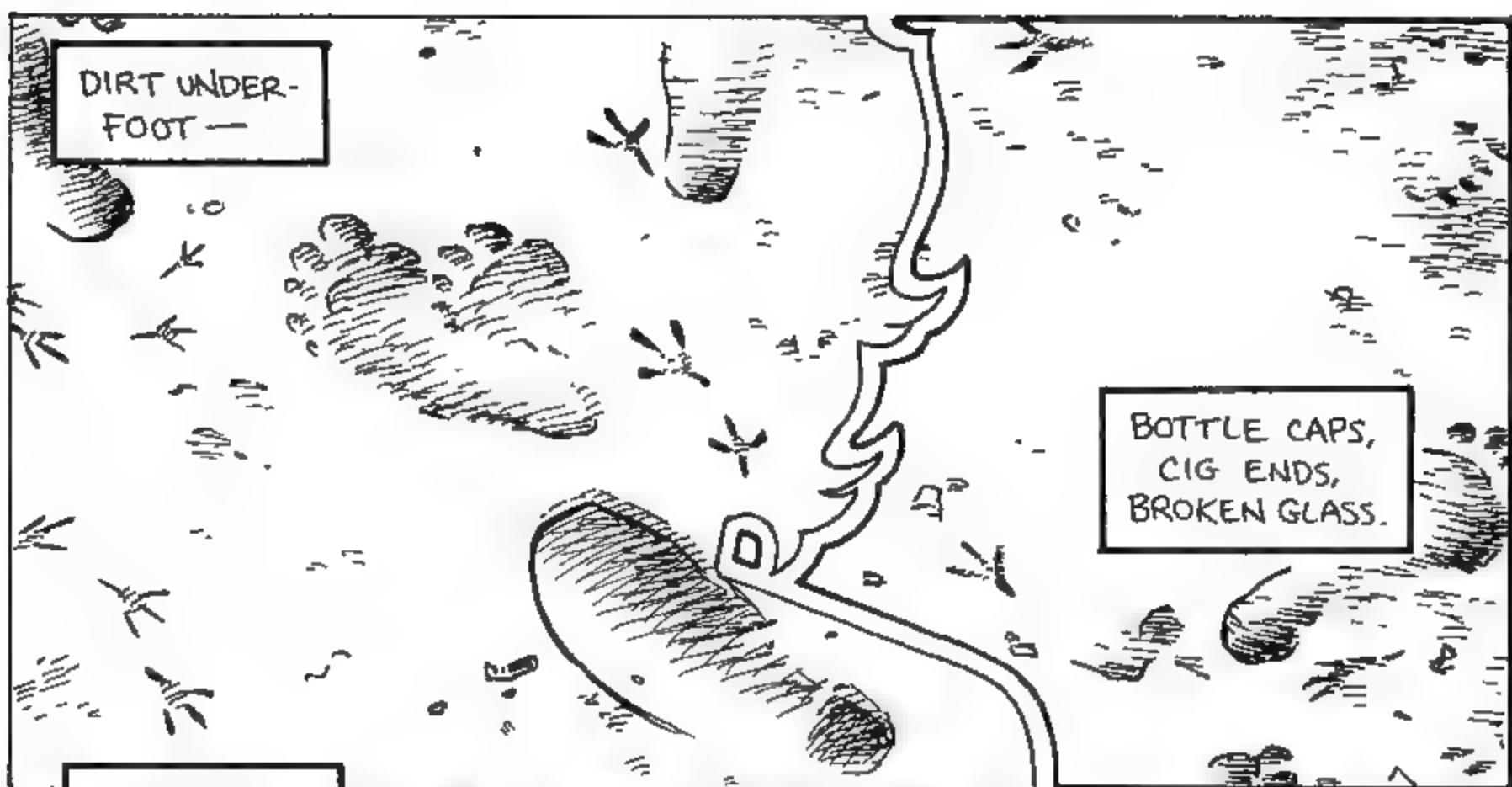






four:





DIRT UNDER-
FOOT —

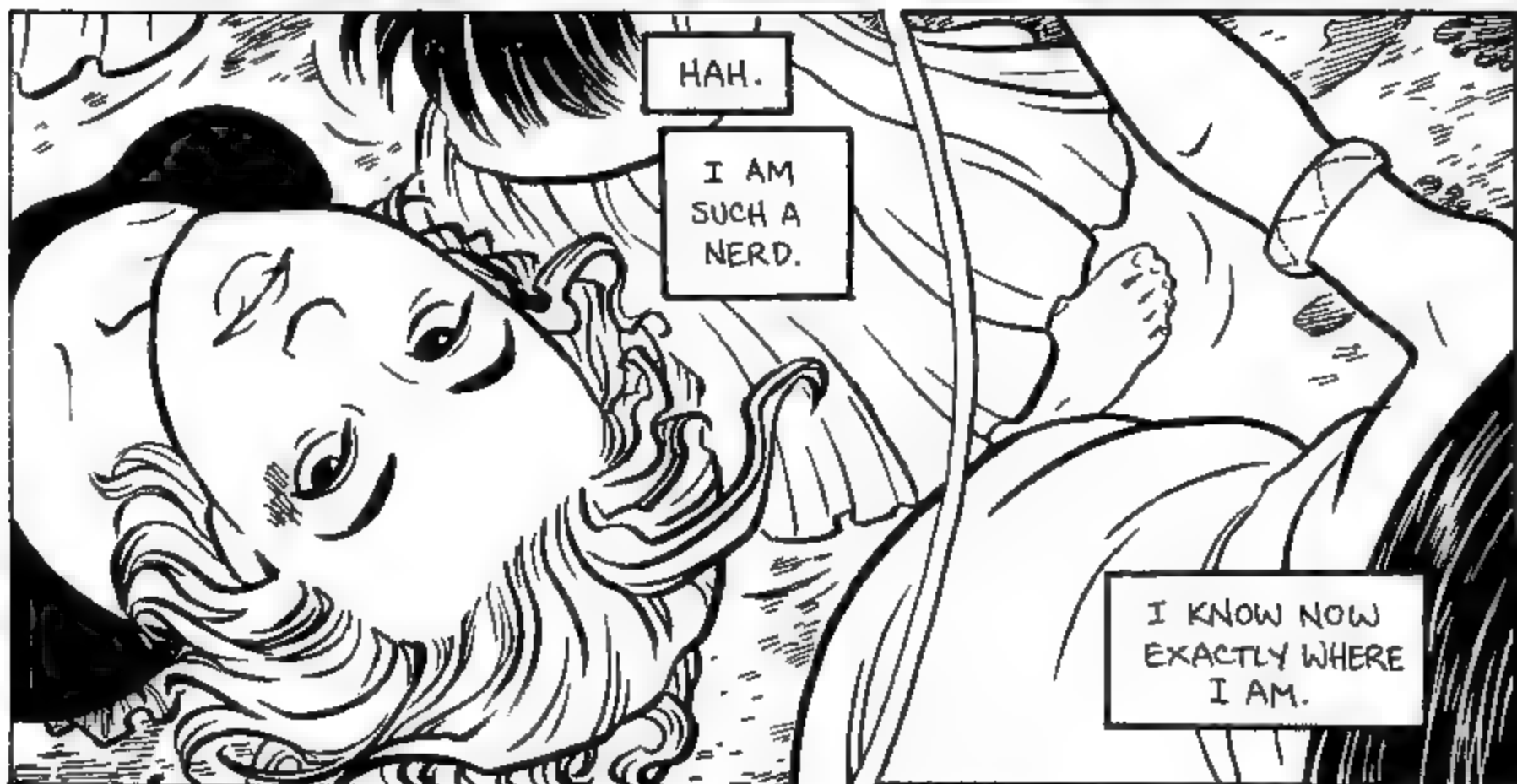
BOTTLE CAPS,
CIG ENDS,
BROKEN GLASS.

OVERHEAD —

A HALF-
DEAD TREE —



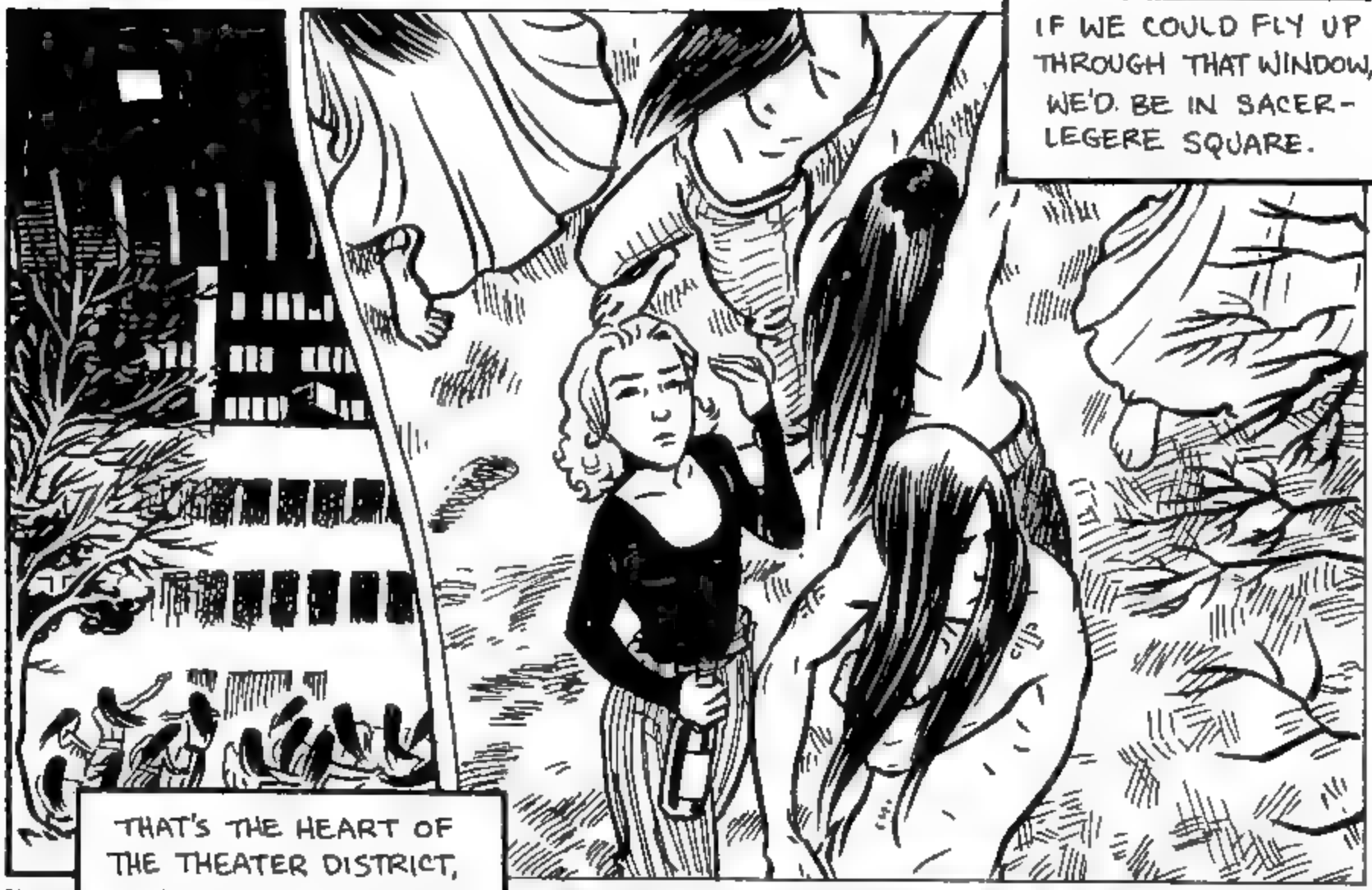
ITS ONLY LIGHT A
SQUARE MOON,
UNMOVING IN A
DIRTY SKY.



HAH.

I AM
SUCH A
NERD.

I KNOW NOW
EXACTLY WHERE
I AM.



IF WE COULD FLY UP THROUGH THAT WINDOW, WE'D BE IN SACER-LEGERE SQUARE.

THAT'S THE HEART OF THE THEATER DISTRICT, WHICH HASN'T GONE DARK IN A HUNDRED YEARS.



IT'S MOSTLY RUN BY LLAVERACS.

THE ONLY LIGHT THAT FILTERS DOWN HERE IS FROM STAGE STARS.



THE CROWD
PARTS

AND
THERE'S THIS
GROTTY OLD
GUY

WHO
SMELLS LIKE PEE
AND OLD LEATHER



AND I LOVE
HIM LIKE I'D
LOVE A HOT
SHOWER AND
A HAMBURGER.

OOOO-
WOOO!



LOOKIT THIS, LOOKIT
THIS, LOOKIT **THIS!**

PAPA GOT LUCKY
TONIGHT, YES **YES!**

YOU GONNA MARRY
OL' PAPA, PRETTY
LITTLE WHITE GIRL?









PARTS OF IT WERE
CRYSTAL CLEAR IN
MY MIND AFTERWARD.



ESPECIALLY
THE WOMEN



THE WOMEN
WHO WERE



WHO WERE

WHO
WERE

WHO WERE

WHAT ARE
THEY DOING?

HAHA!
THEY
MOURN!

WE
MOURN!

THEIR MEN
ARE DEAD!

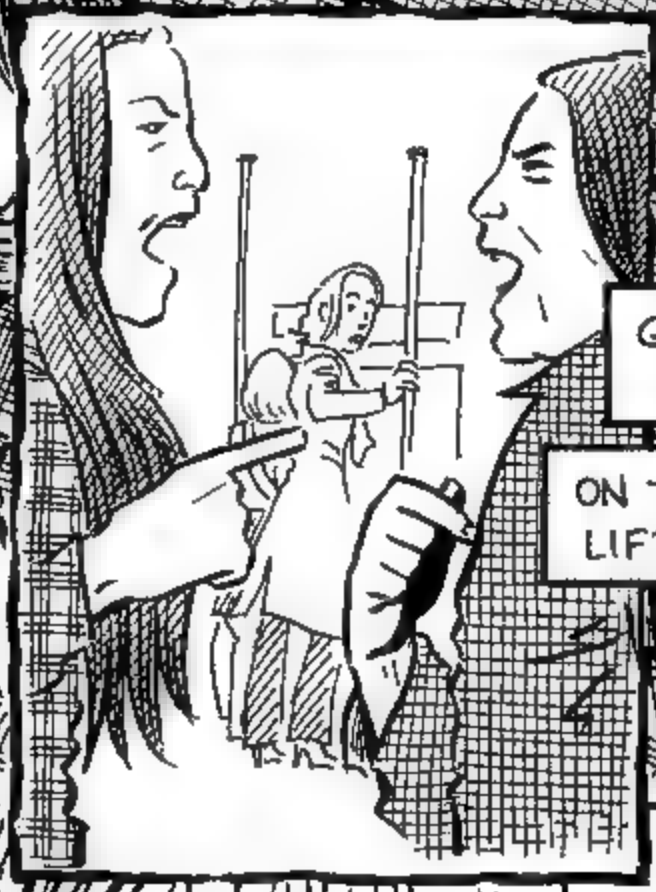
WE ARE
WARRIORS!
WHEN WE ARE
CAPTURED, WE
FIGHT!

OH
SHIT



ARE
THOSE

THE CITY
KILLED
THEM!
HAHA!



THE SAME
GUYS I
SAW

GUYS I SAW
FIGHTING

ON THE
LIFT?

TOLD YOU
SHE'S A
BITCH!



GUYS I
CALLED THE
COPS ON?

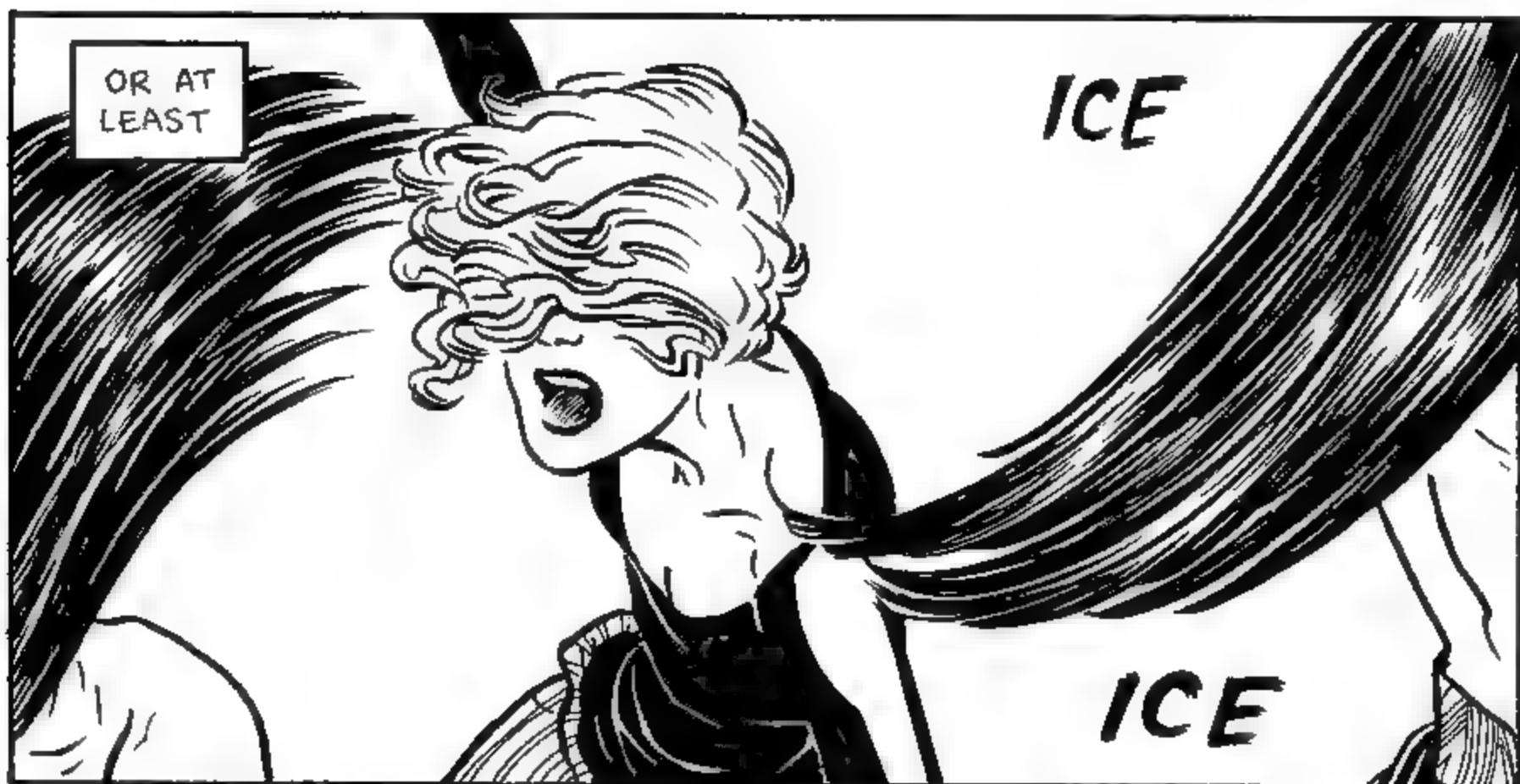
GUYS I SAW
AT THE COP
STATION?

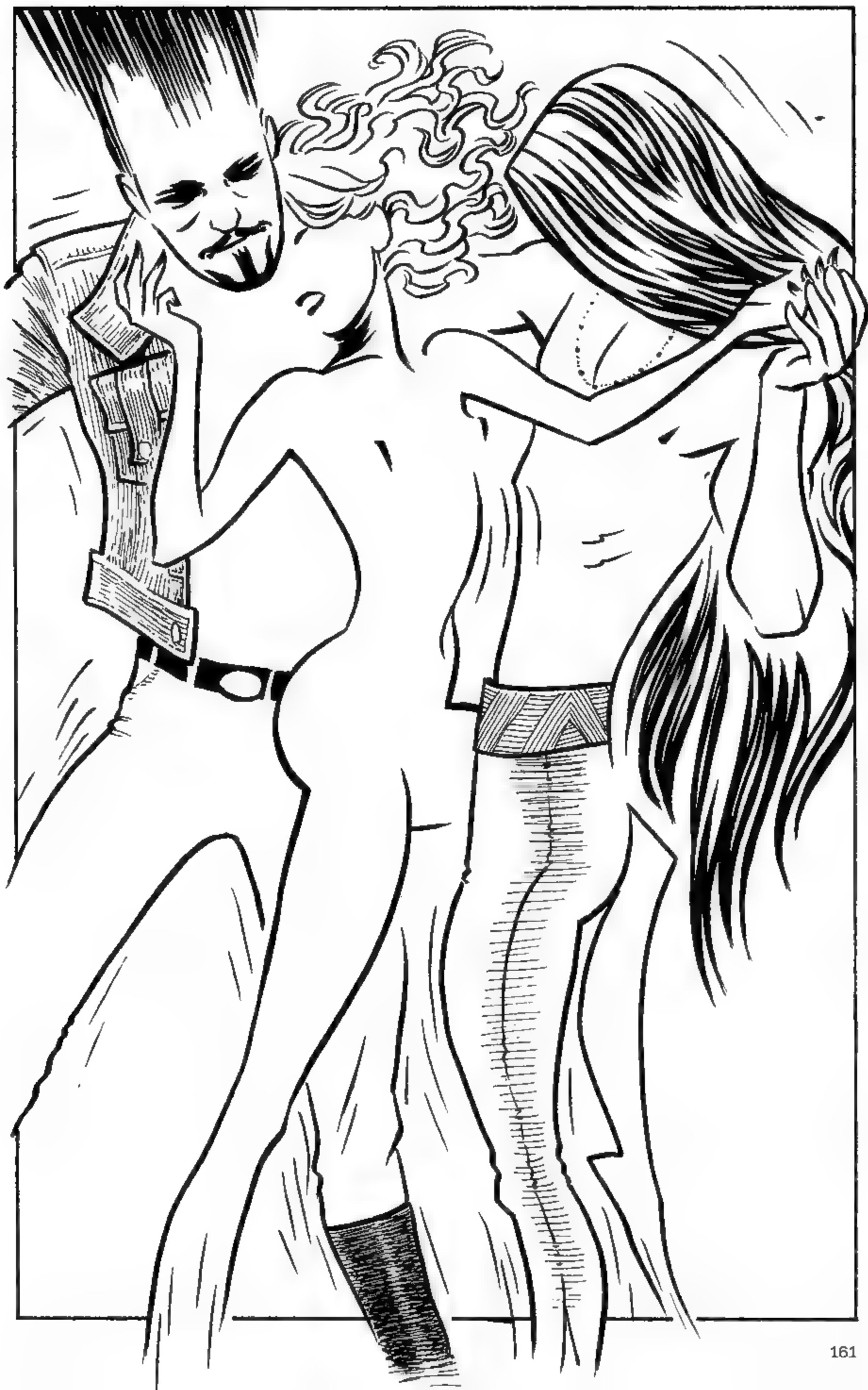












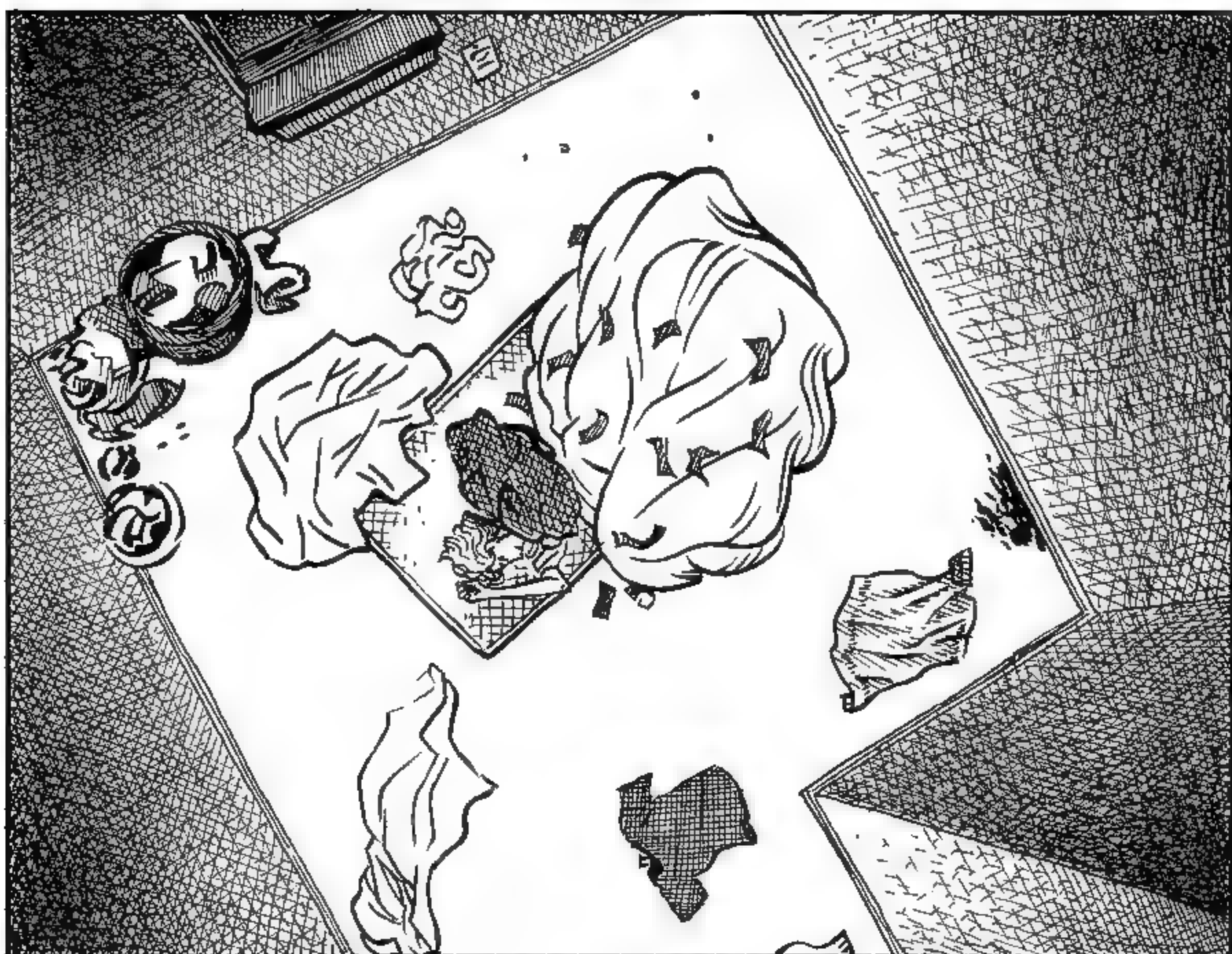


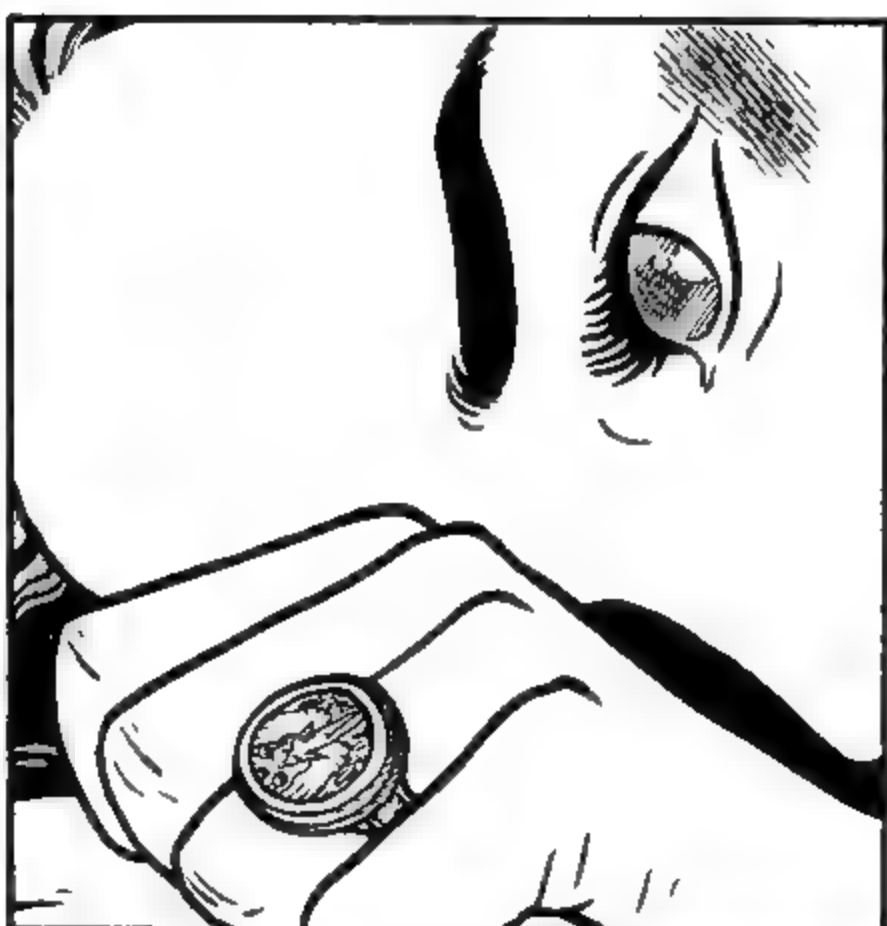
AFTER THAT

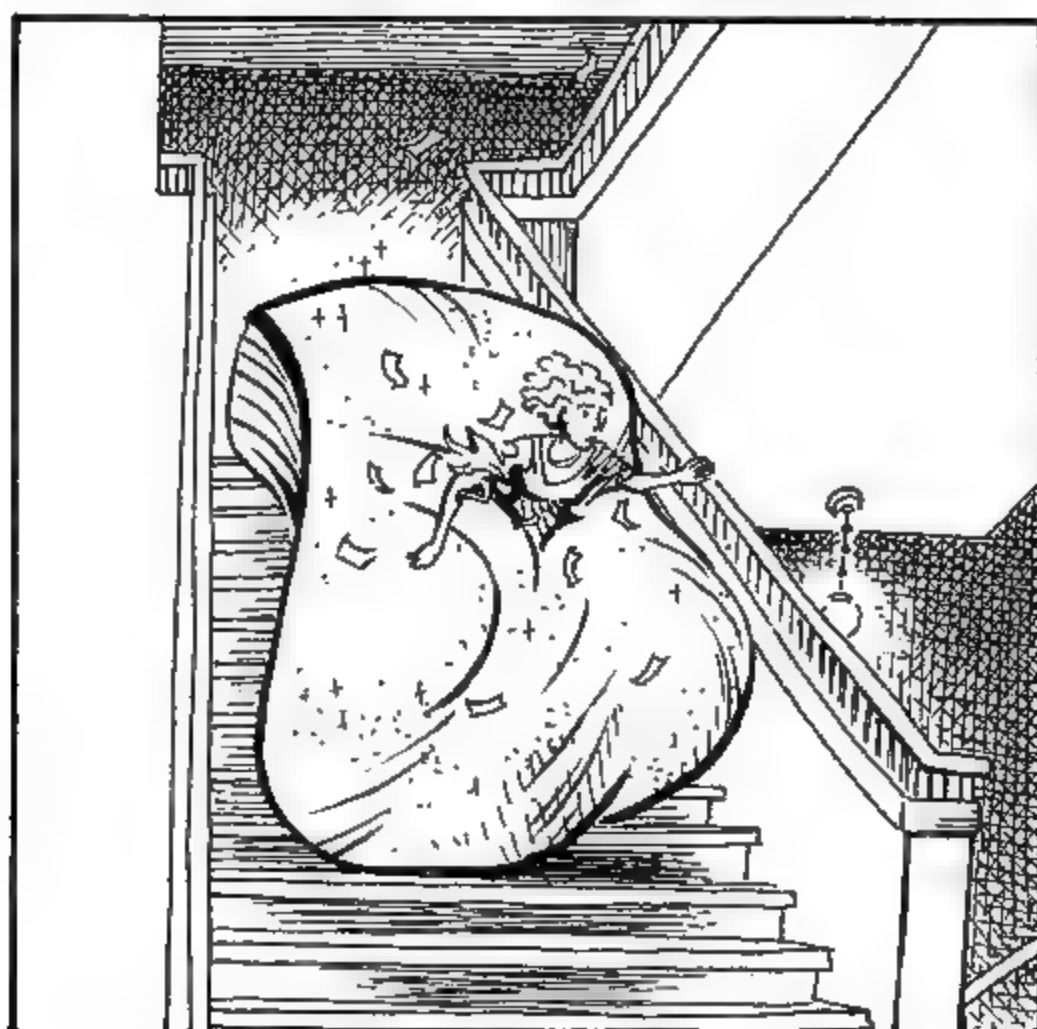


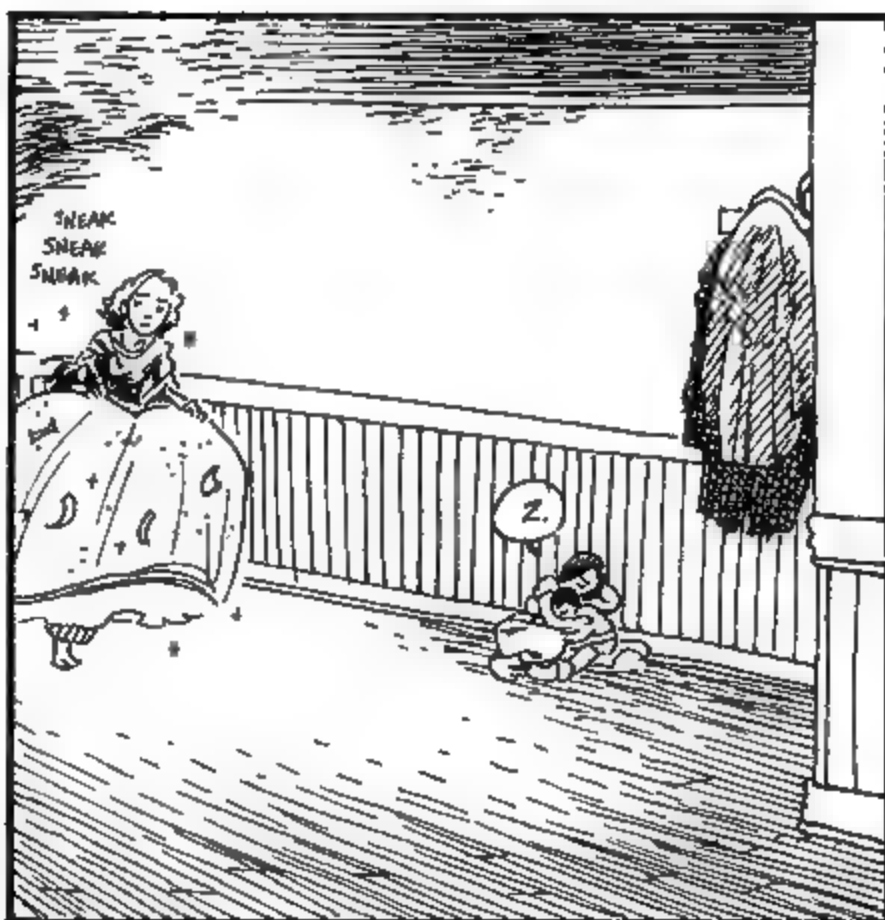
I DON'T REMEMBER

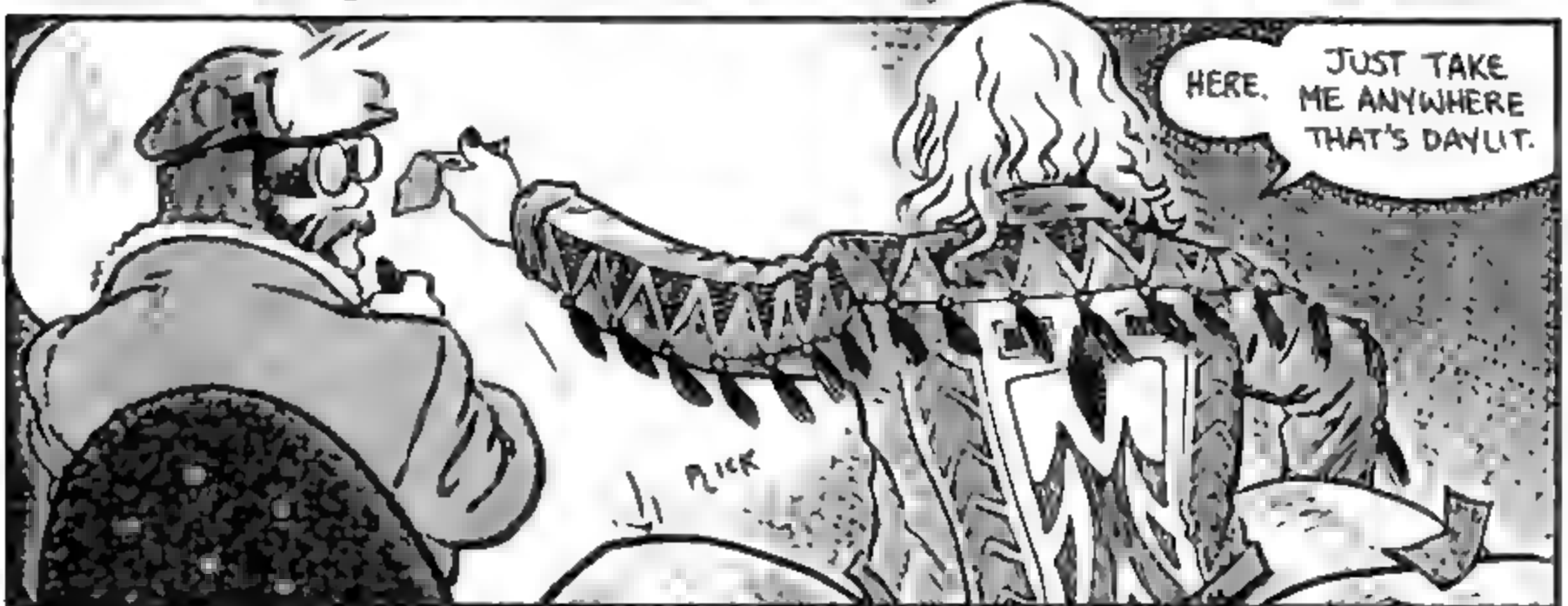
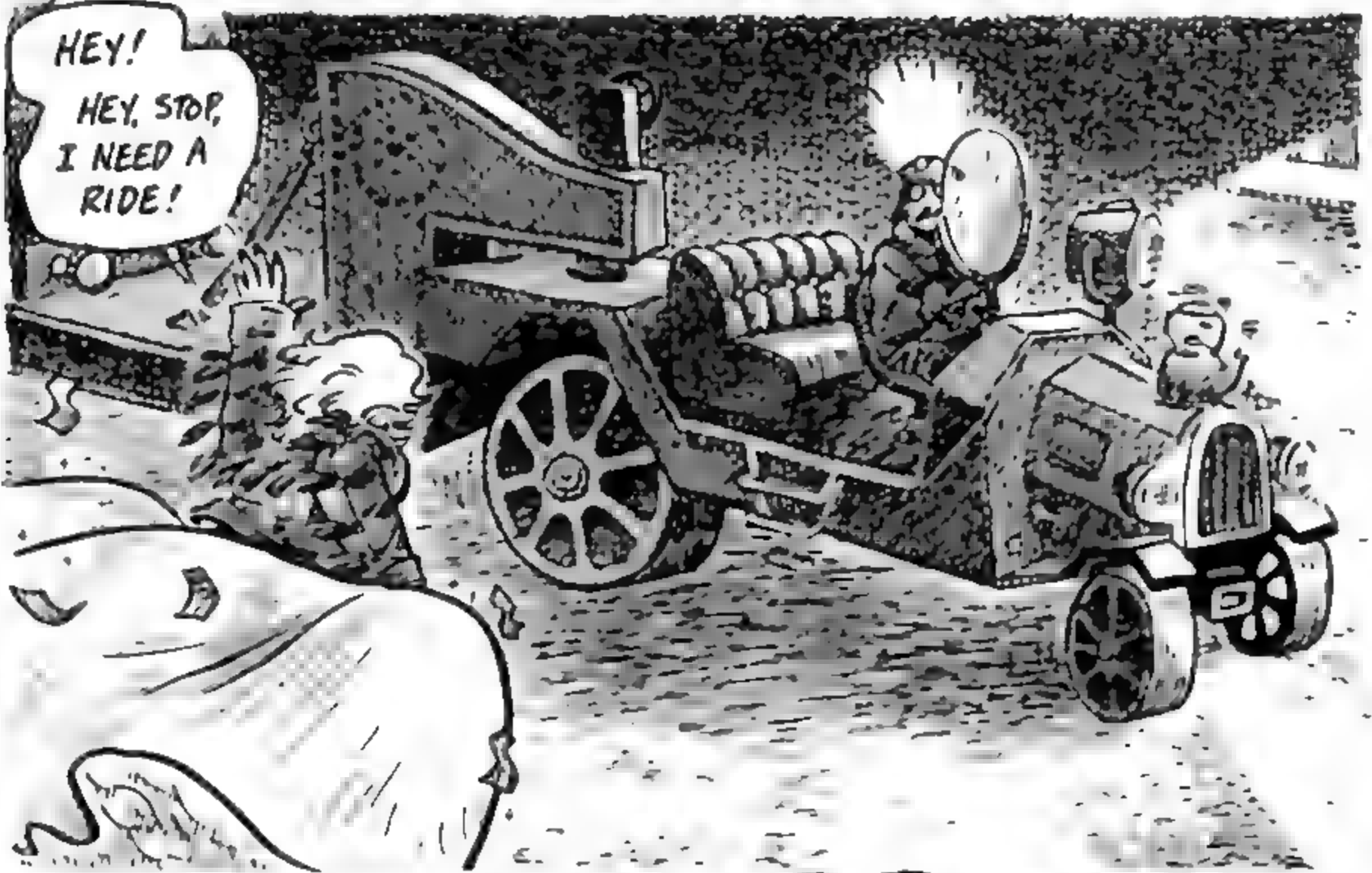
MUCH OF ANYTHING.

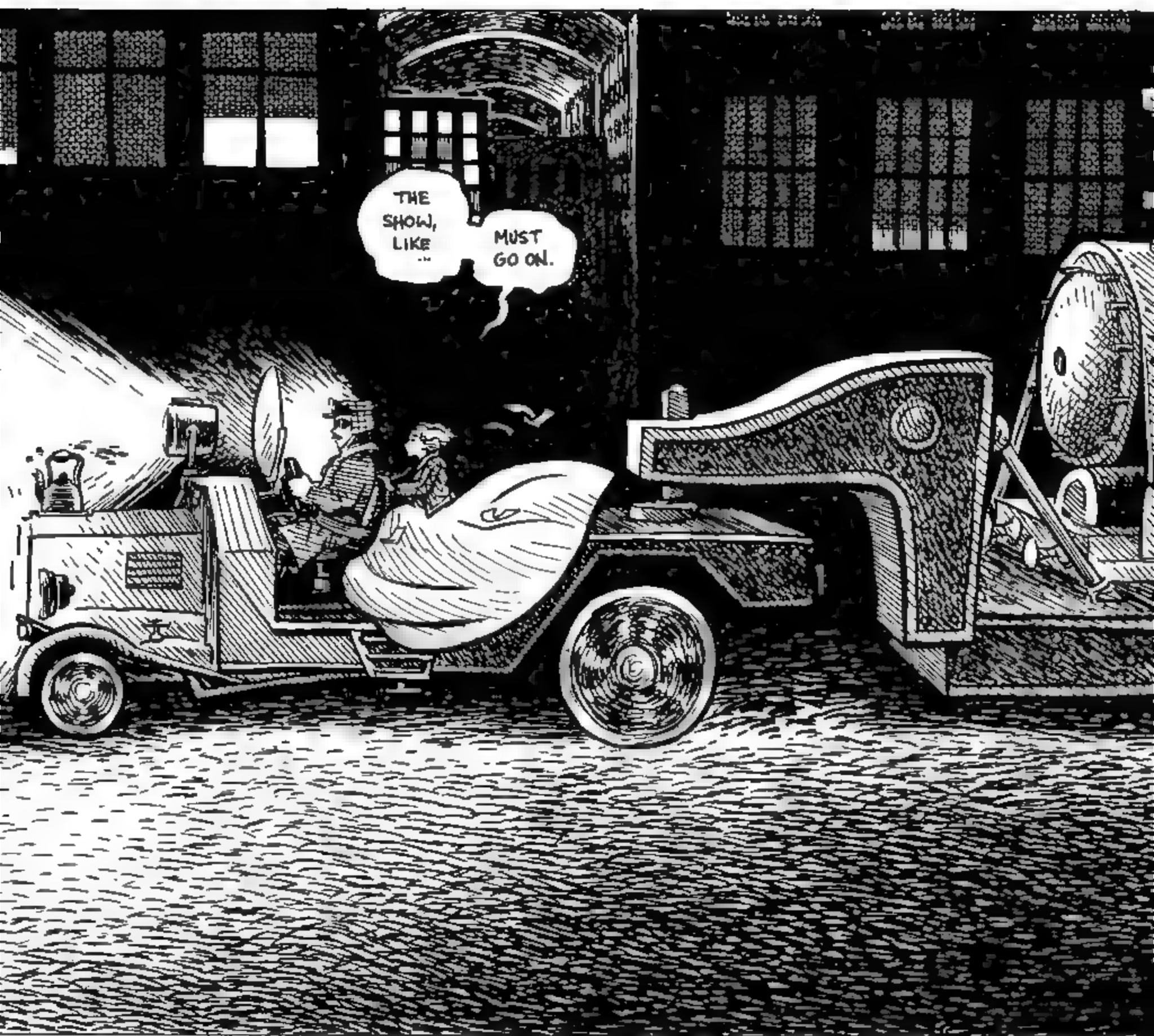






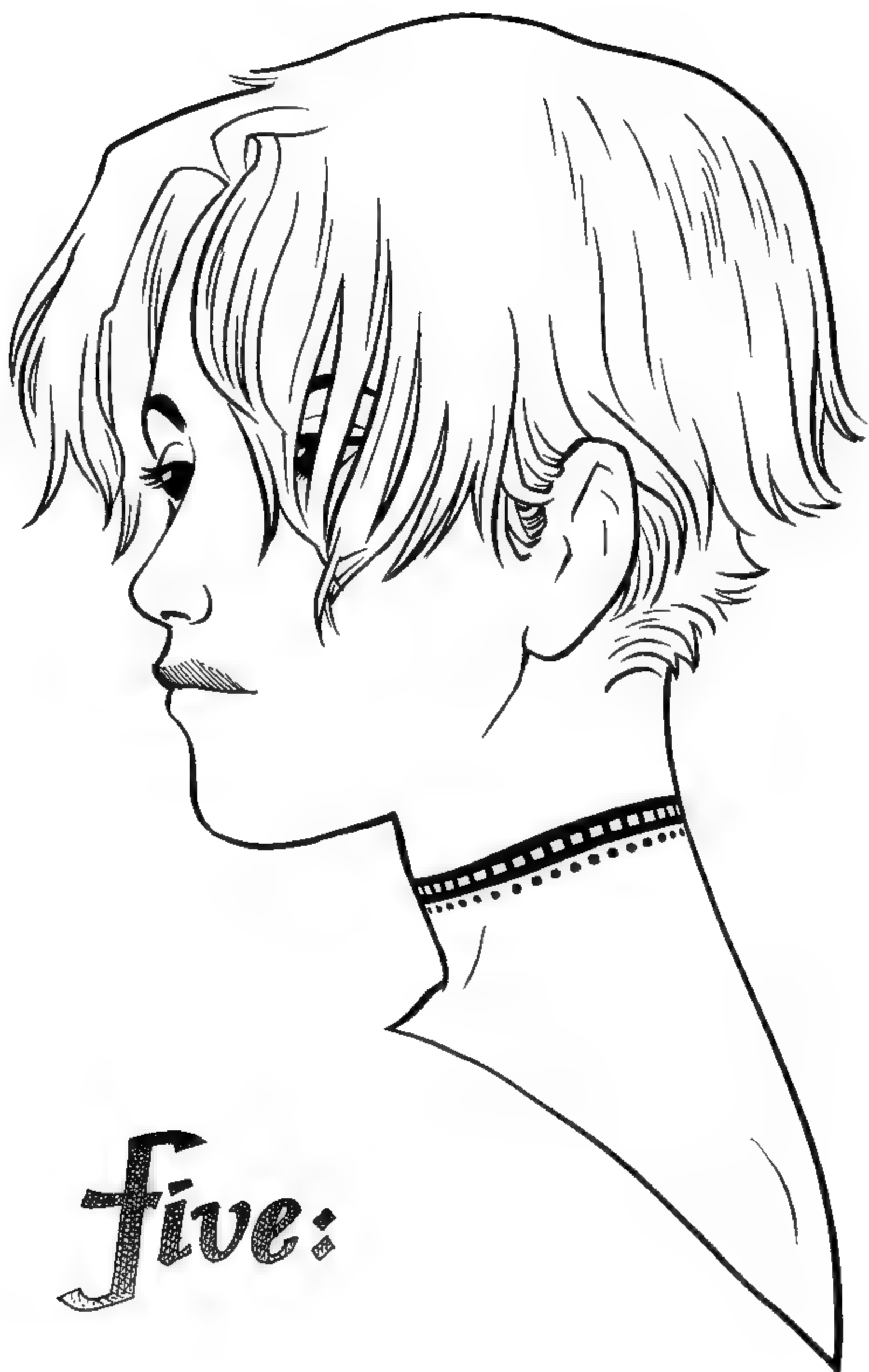






THE
SHOW,
LIKE
...

MUST
GO ON.





GET OUT OF
MY WAY. I
DON'T CARE!

YOU ARE **NOT**
GOING OUT ON THAT
STAGE WITHOUT HAIR
AND MAKE-UP!

BRING 'EM ON, THEN!
DO IT NOW! DO IT!

YOU KNOW THE RULES, YOU SILLY
LITTLE SLUTCH! YOU BLEW IT! YOU'RE
OUT! YOU MISSED MORNING CALL!

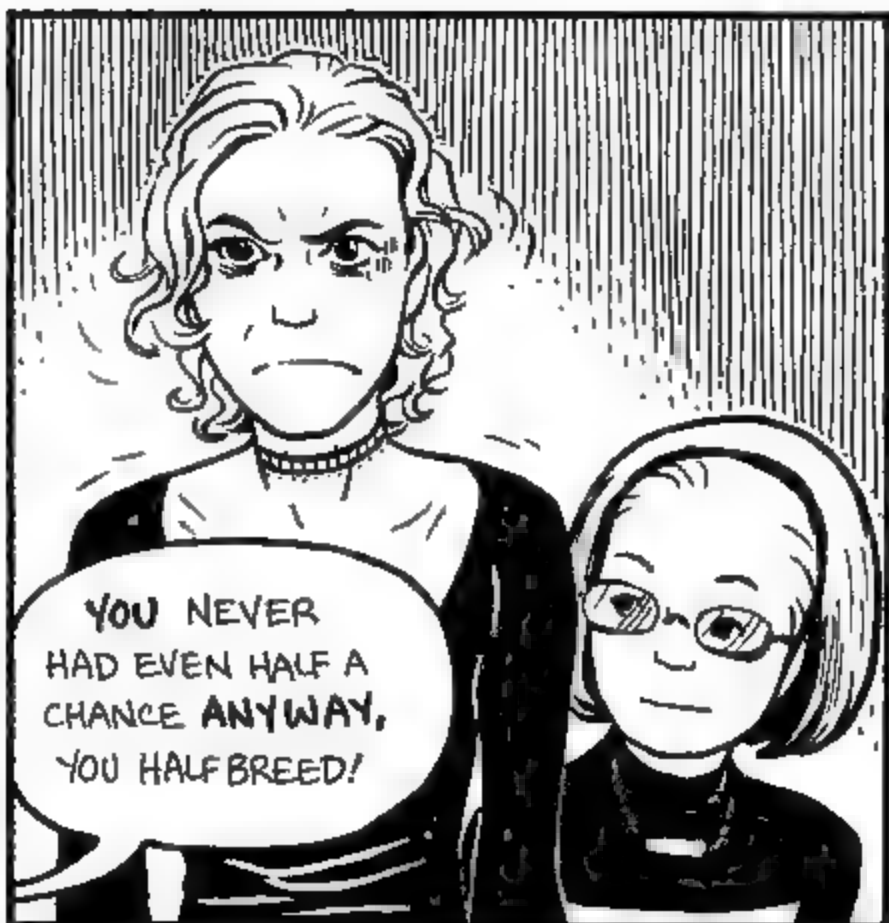
THAT'S
BULLSHIT!

YOU CAN'T SLAM THE DOOR ON
MY WHOLE **LIFE** WITH A GODDAMN **TIME**
CLOCK! YOU CAN NOT, WILL NOT, ARE NOT!

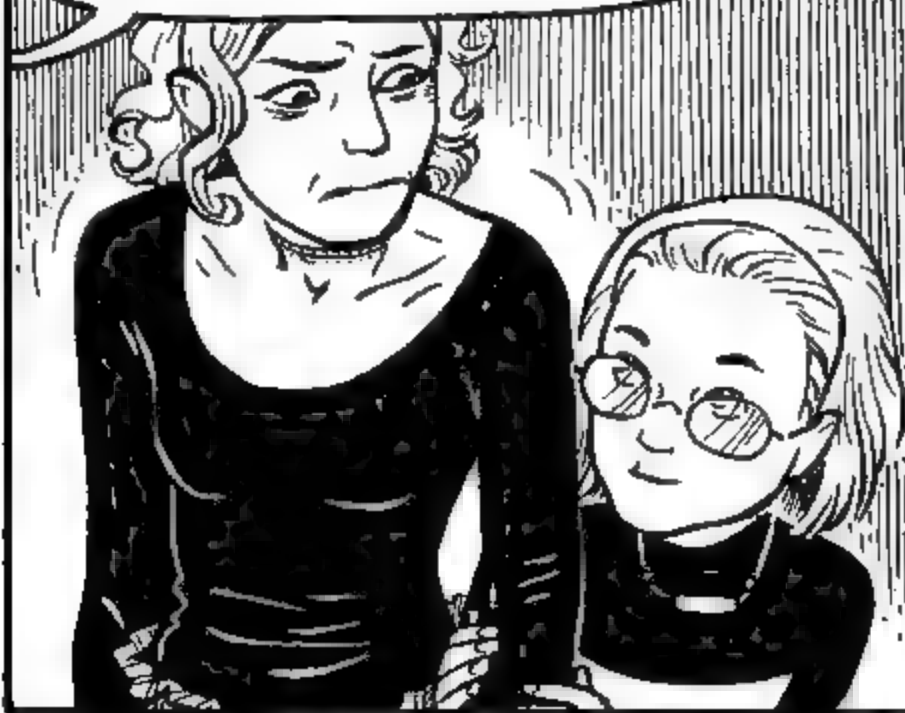
CAN. WILL. AND ARE. NOW GO SIT YOUR SKINNY ASS DOWN AND WATCH YOUR PEERS WIN BEFORE I SLAP YOU RIGHT ACROSS THAT BLACK EYE.



YOU NEVER HAD EVEN HALF A CHANCE ANYWAY, YOU HALF BREED!



YOU HAVE NO PRESENCE, YOU'RE JUST A HOLE ON THE STAGE, YOU ARE NOT EVEN REMOTELY ORIGINAL!

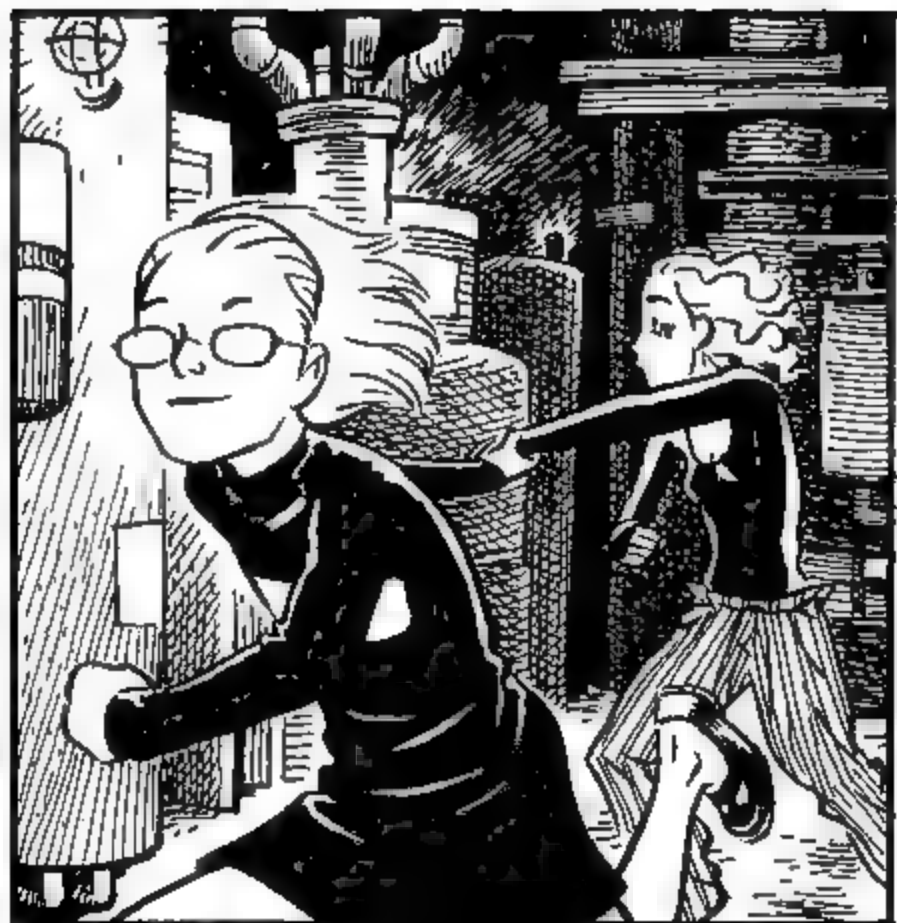


YOU CAN'T EVEN SCREAM YOUR WAY INTO MASTERING A SITUATION —

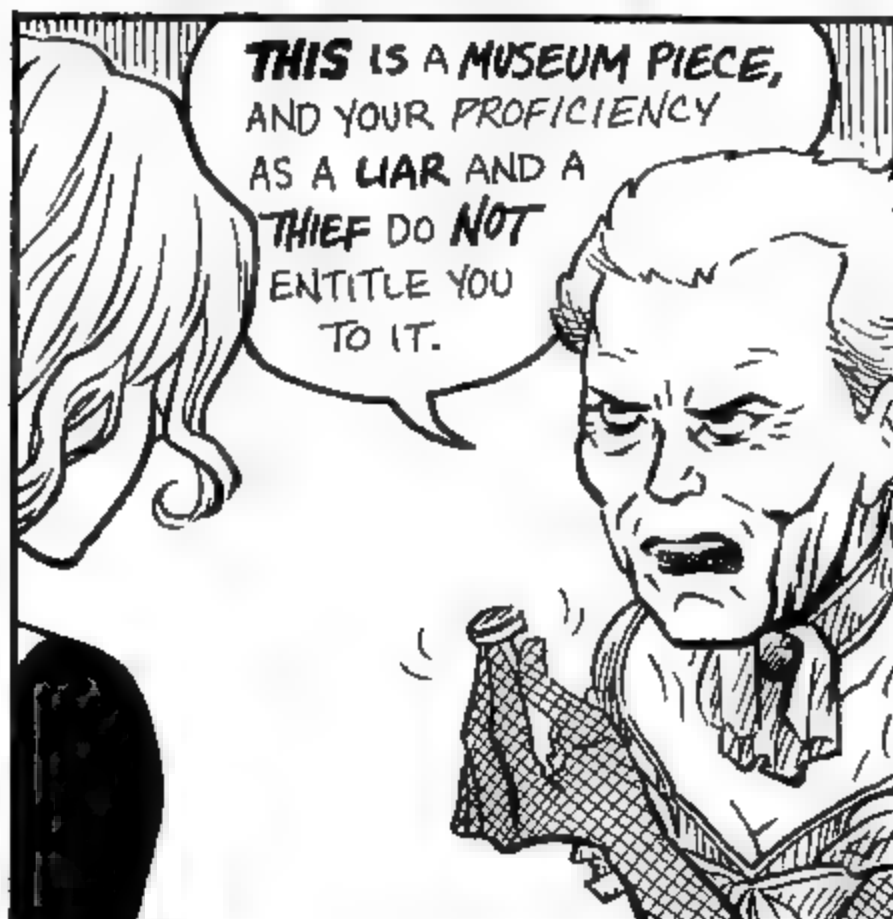
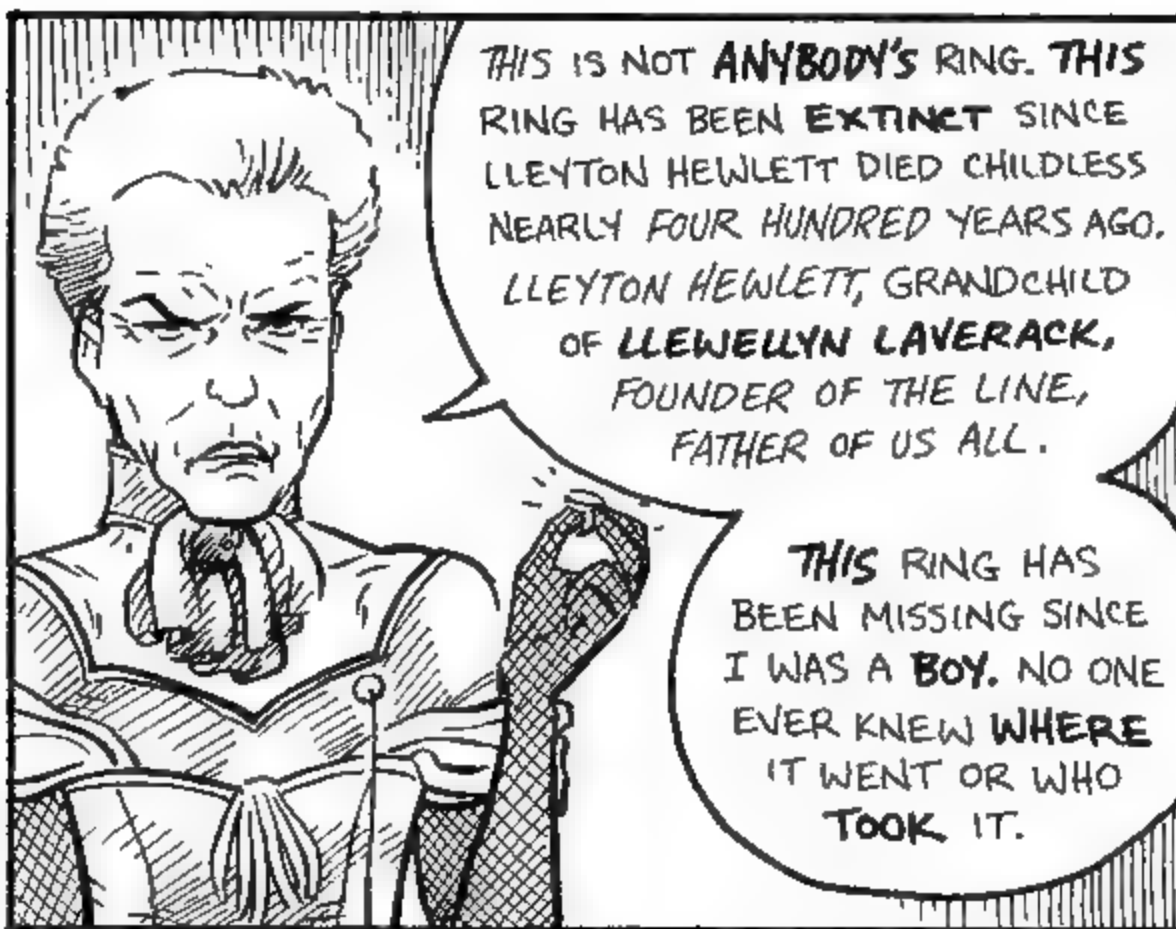


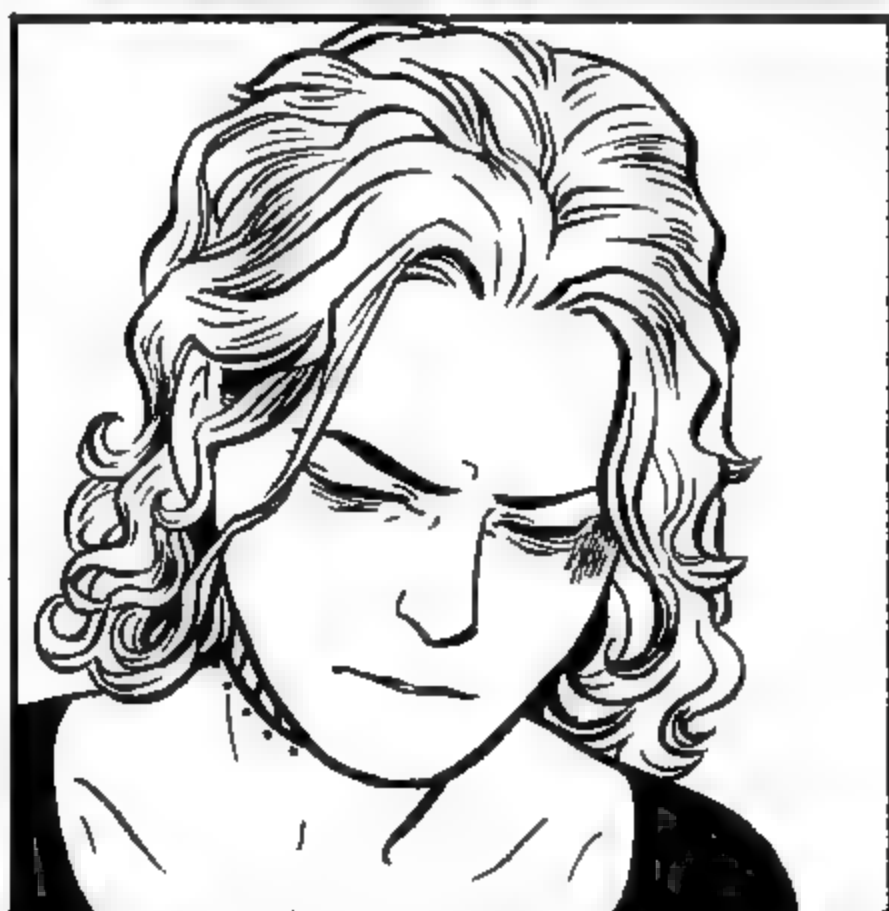
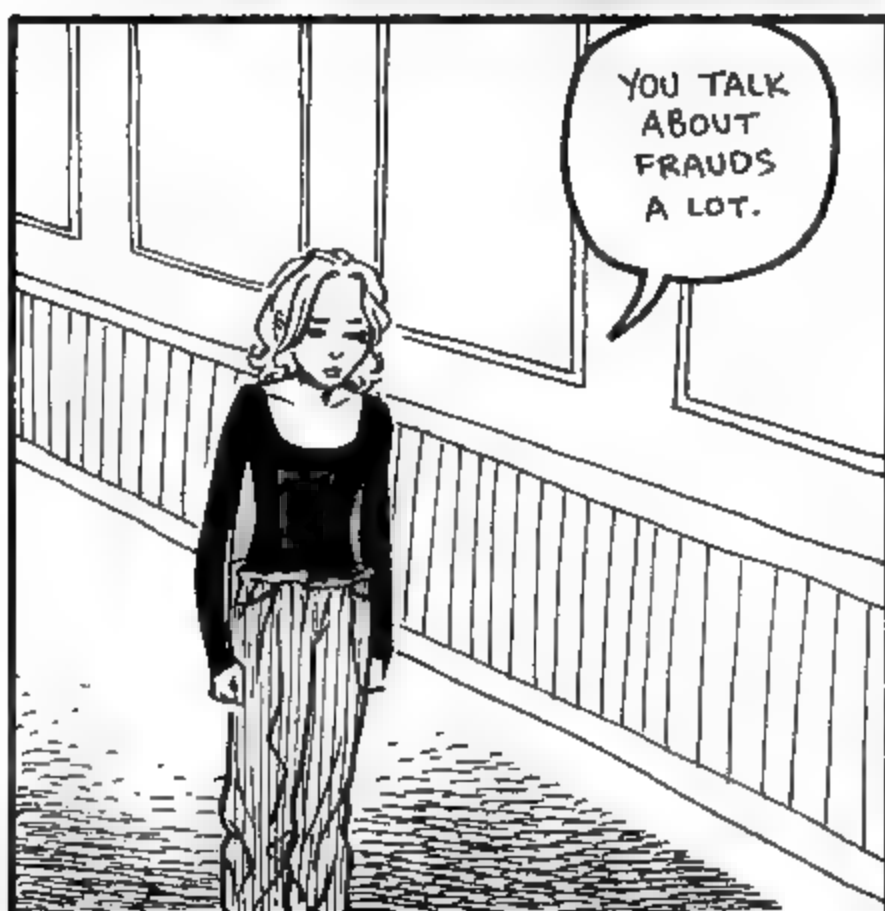
IT TAKES MORE THAN DRAMA TO MAKE A QUEEN, BABY!














AN **ACTUAL** WOMAN, I MEAN. A PHYSICAL FEMALE, NOT JUST AN **APPARENT** ONE.

ALL THOSE GIRLS YOU SPONSOR EVERY YEAR, ONE OR TWO, SOMETIMES **MORE**.

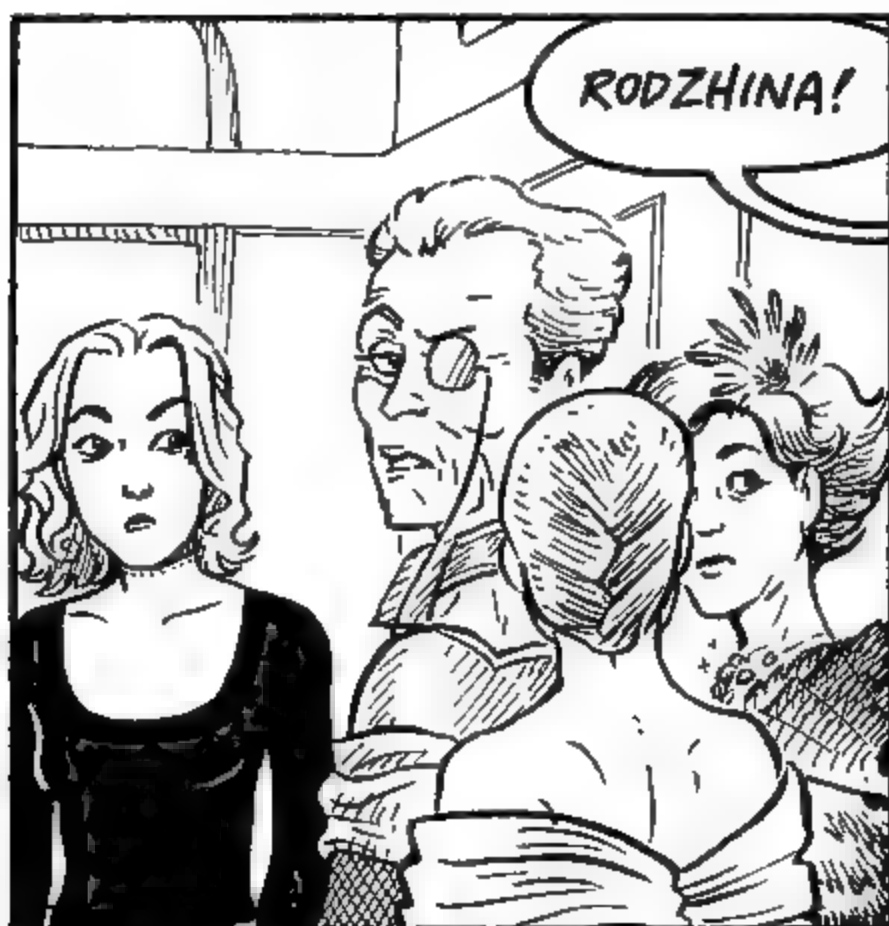
YOU LET PEOPLE THINK YOU'RE **MALE** SO YOU CAN PASS THEM OFF AS YOUR **BASTARDS**, BUT THEY CAN'T BE, CAN THEY? YOU'RE DEFRAUDING THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT TO GET RINGS FOR THEM.

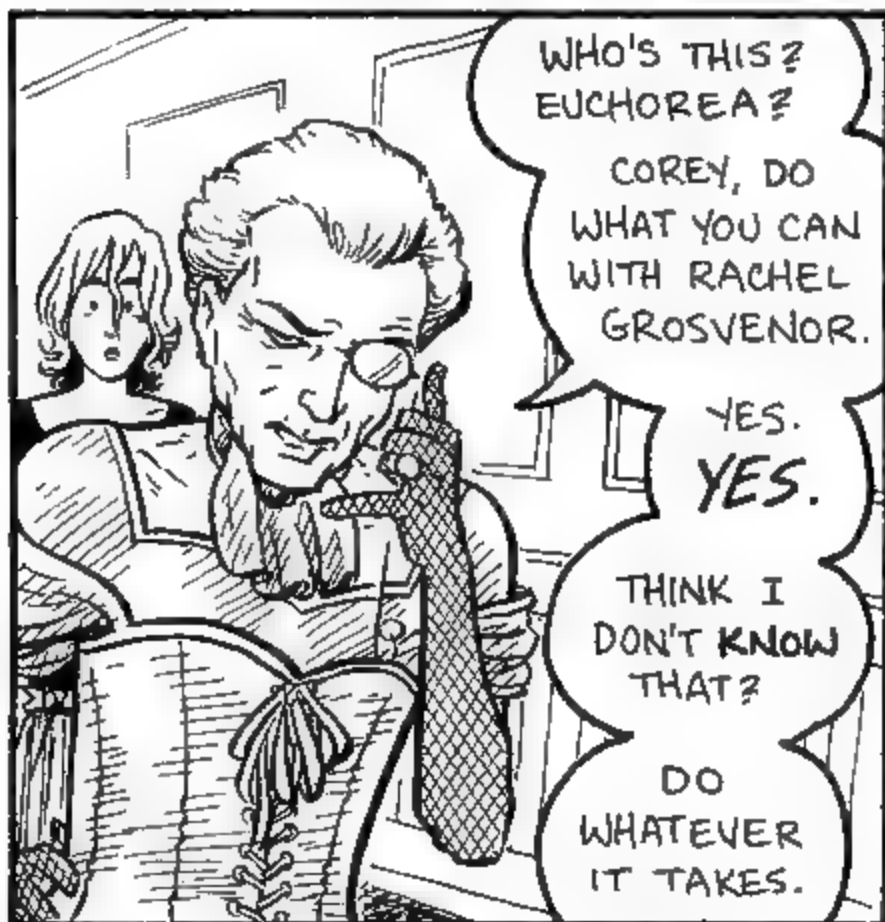
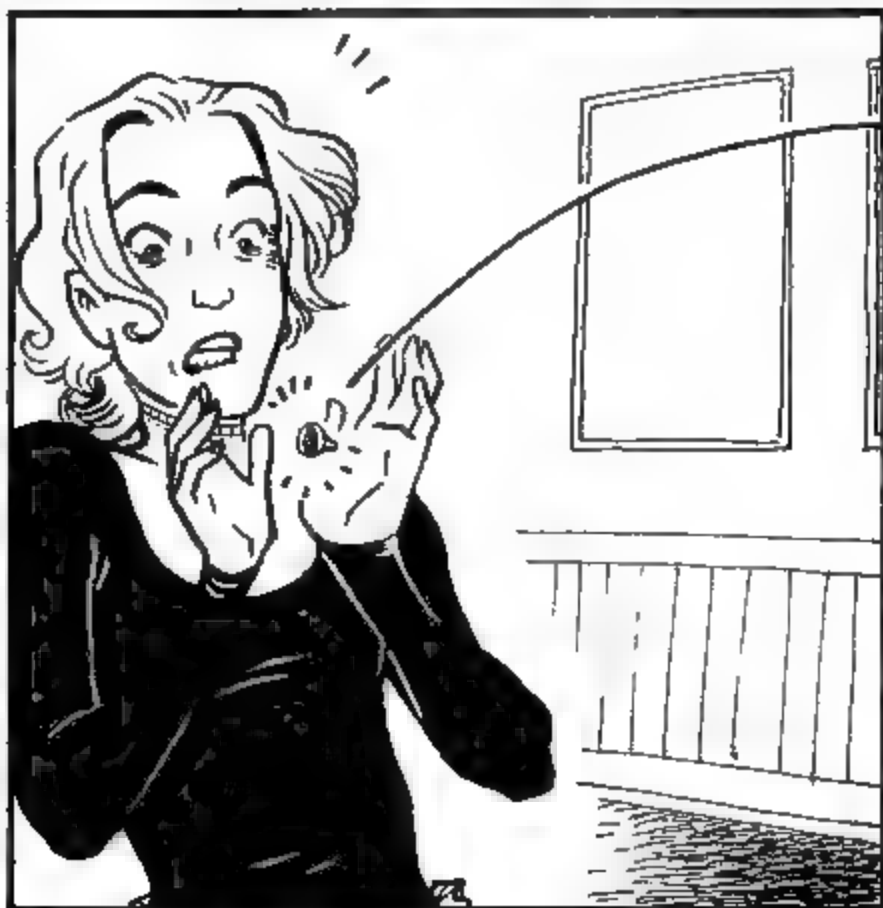
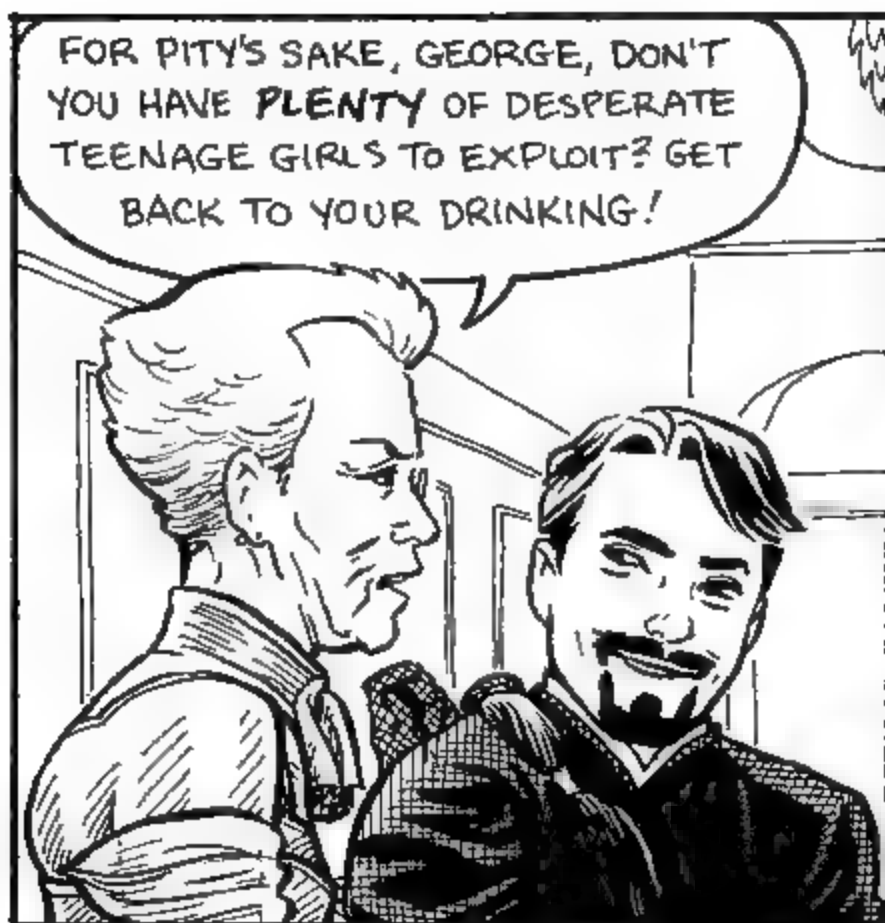
FAMOUS FAKES. THAT'S VERY FUNNY. YOU'RE **ALL** FAKES.


I THINK... I THINK MAYBE THE WHOLE **CLAN** SHOULD KNOW?



THEY ALL ALREADY **KNOW**, YOU LITTLE IDIOT.







THIS IS THE BIG NIGHT,
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN...

THIS IS WHAT IT ALL
COMES DOWN TO, LADIES
AND GENTLEMEN....

I'VE GOT **TWENTY**
GIRLS....

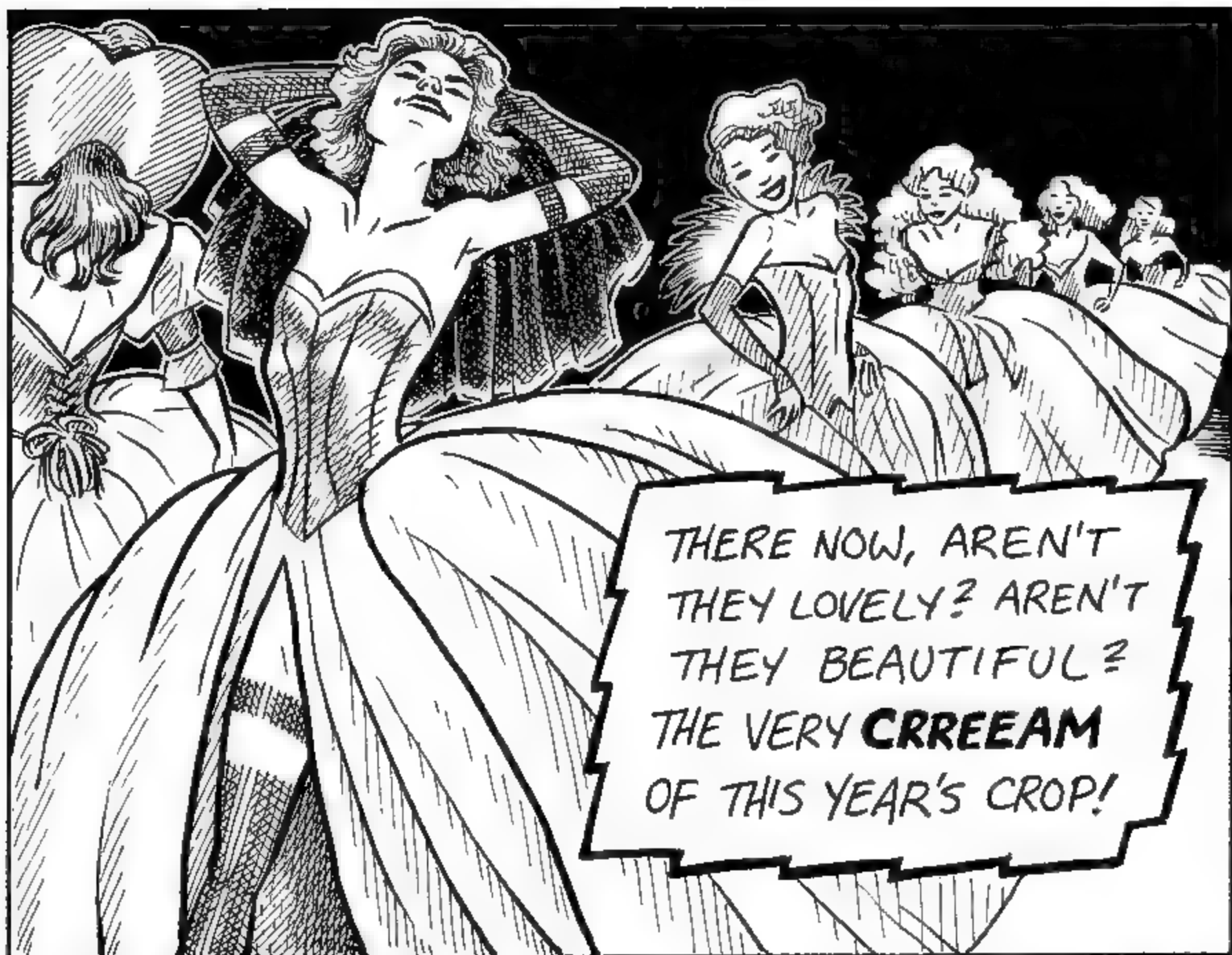
I'VE GOT **ONE**
CROWN....

WHICH OF THESE TWENTY LOVELY
PAWNS SHALL BE QUEEN OF THE
FIVE HUNDRED AND FIFTY-SEVENTH
LLAVERAC CLAN CONFORMATION
COMPETITION?



LET'S WELCOME BACK OUR TWENTY
BEAUTIFUL CONTESTANTS TONIGHT!

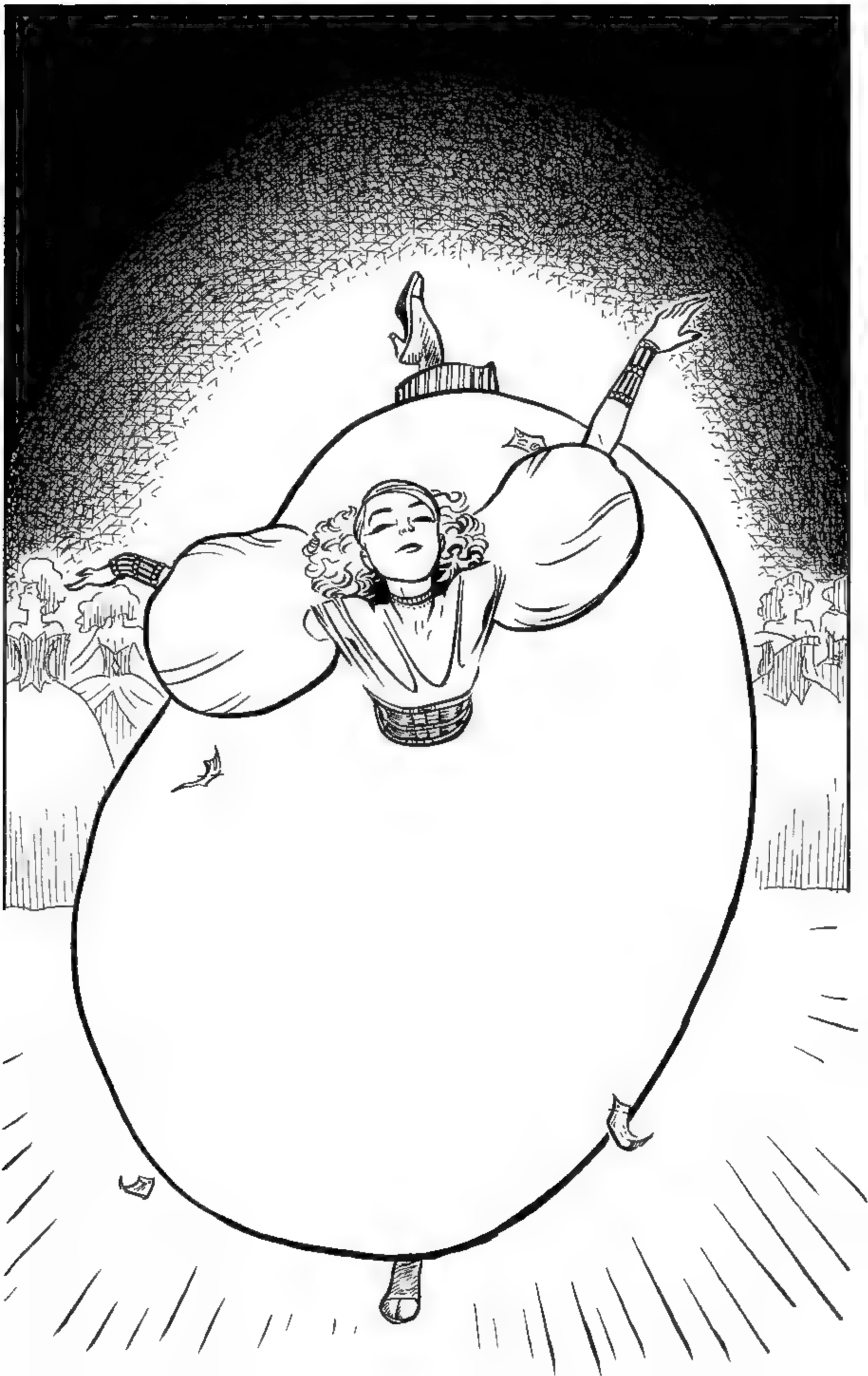


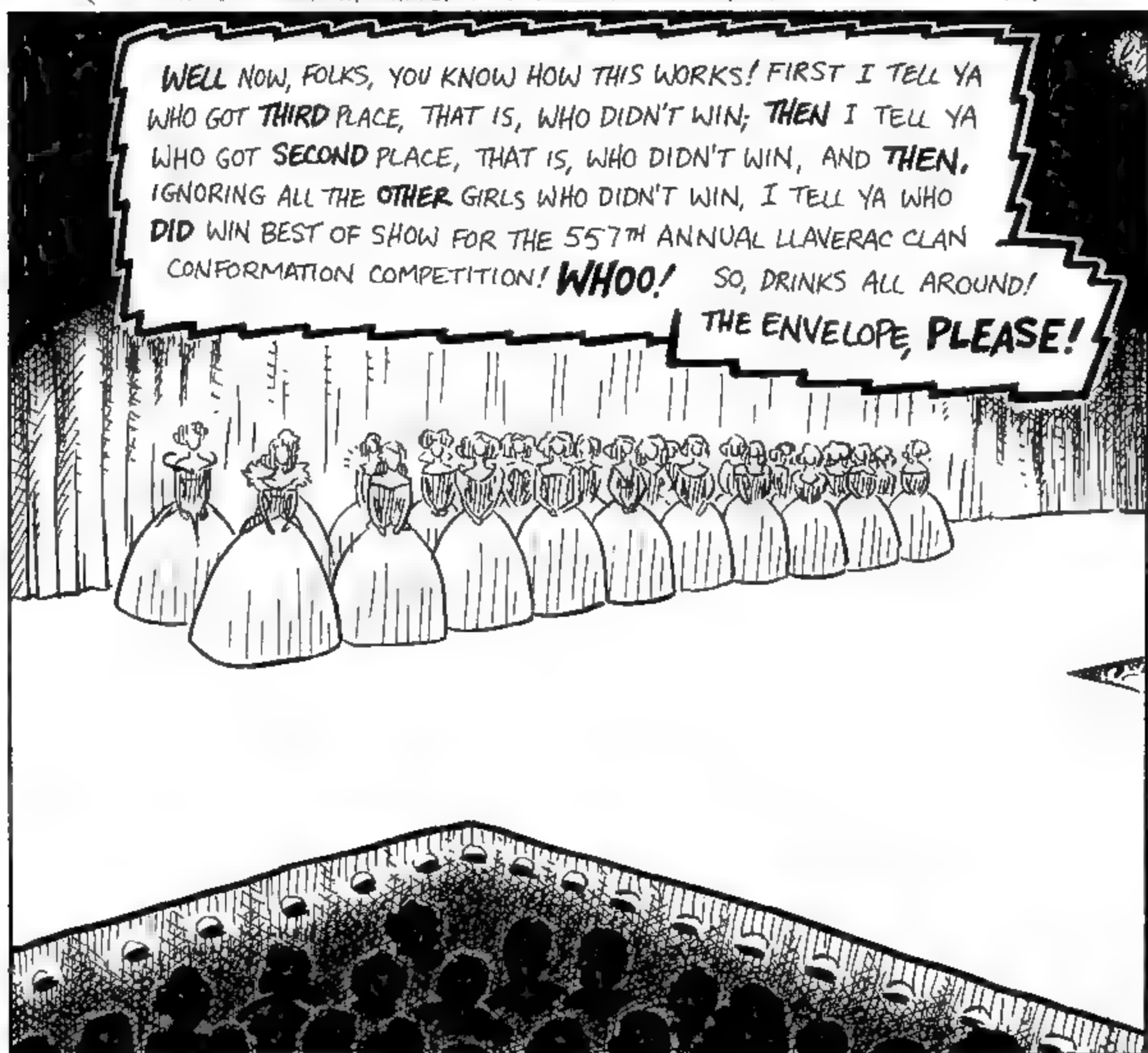
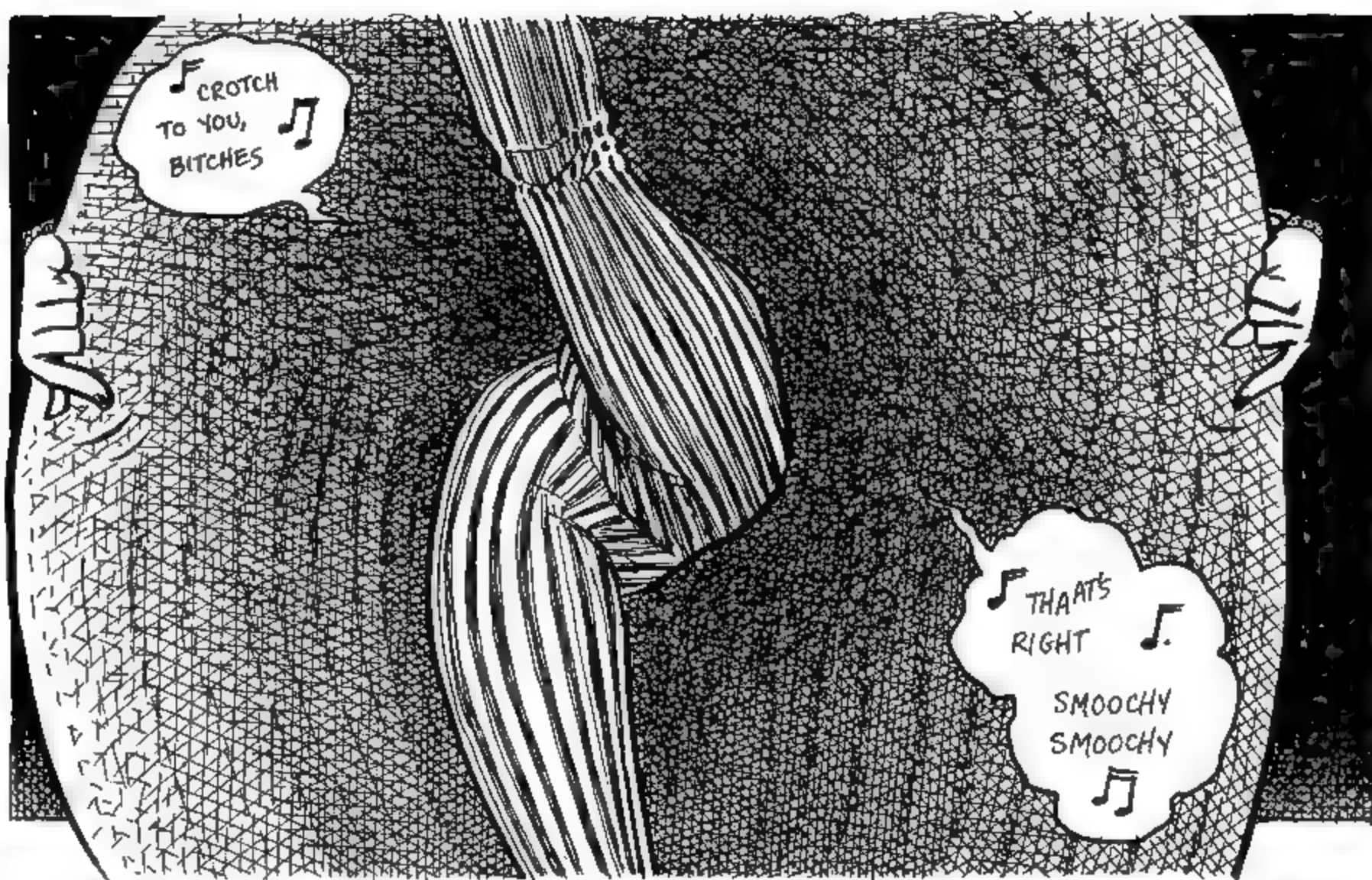


LEIS PHY THEM SOME ATTENTION NOW

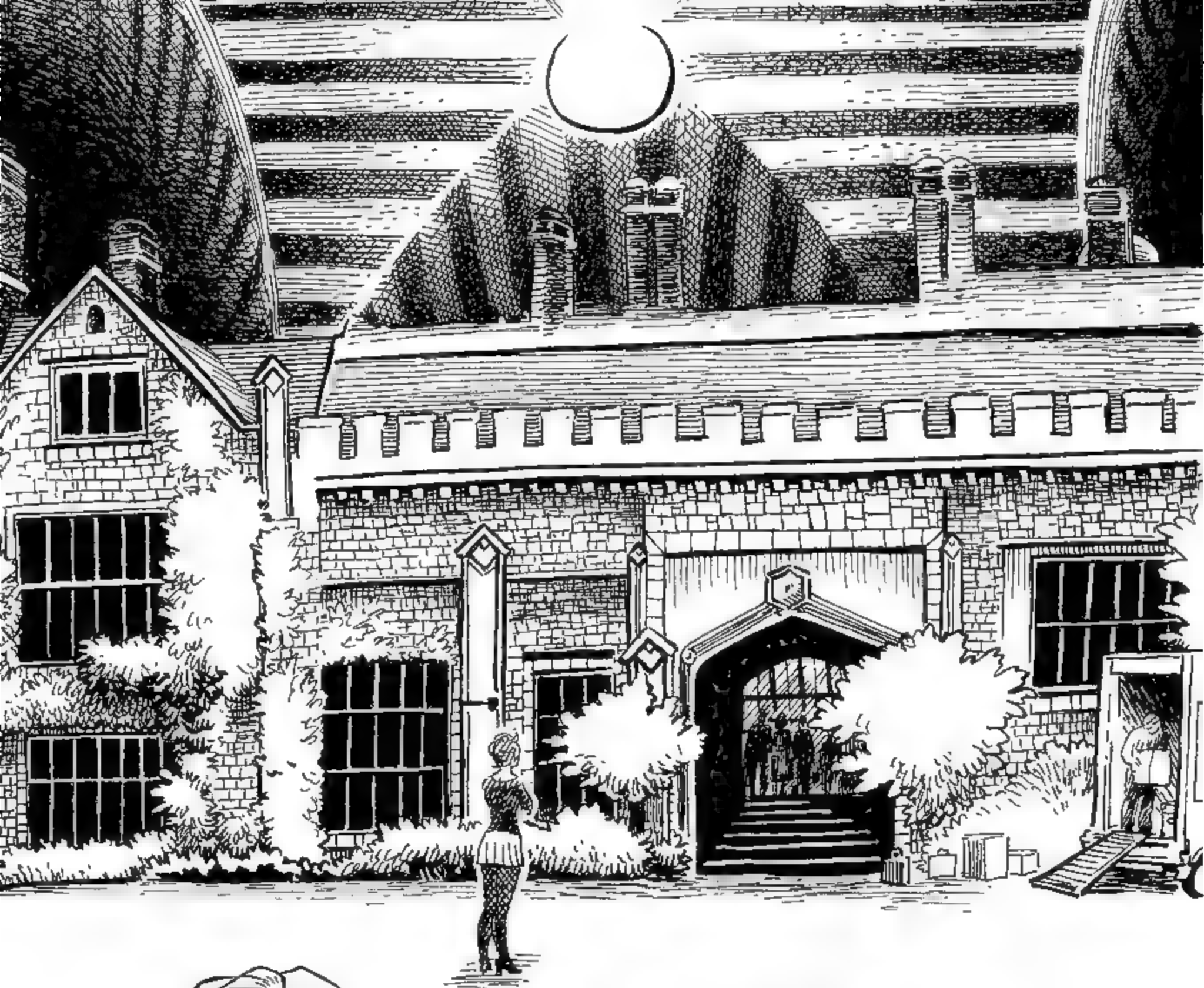
















"MY CLAN'S QUEEN
IS JUST A **TINY**
LITTLE THING.
I MEAN YOU'D
NEVER THINK
SO FROM HER
ROCK VIDEOS.

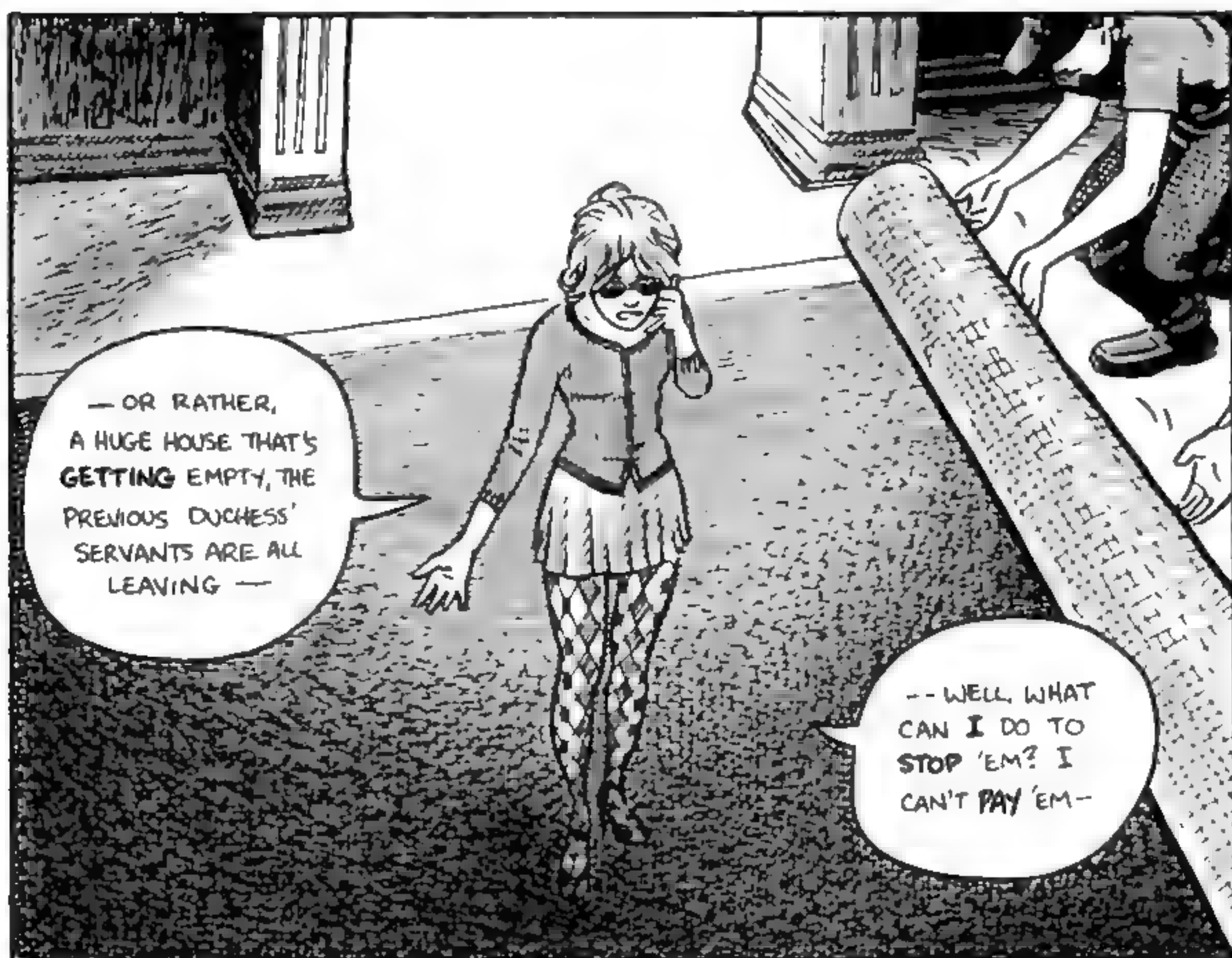
"I MEAN, HEY,
OSTEOPOROSIS
TAKES SOME-
THING OFF ALL
OF US, BUT WHO
D'A THOUGHT
THE BASSIST FOR
"THUNDERCRAP"
WAS BARELY
FIVE FOOT TWO?"



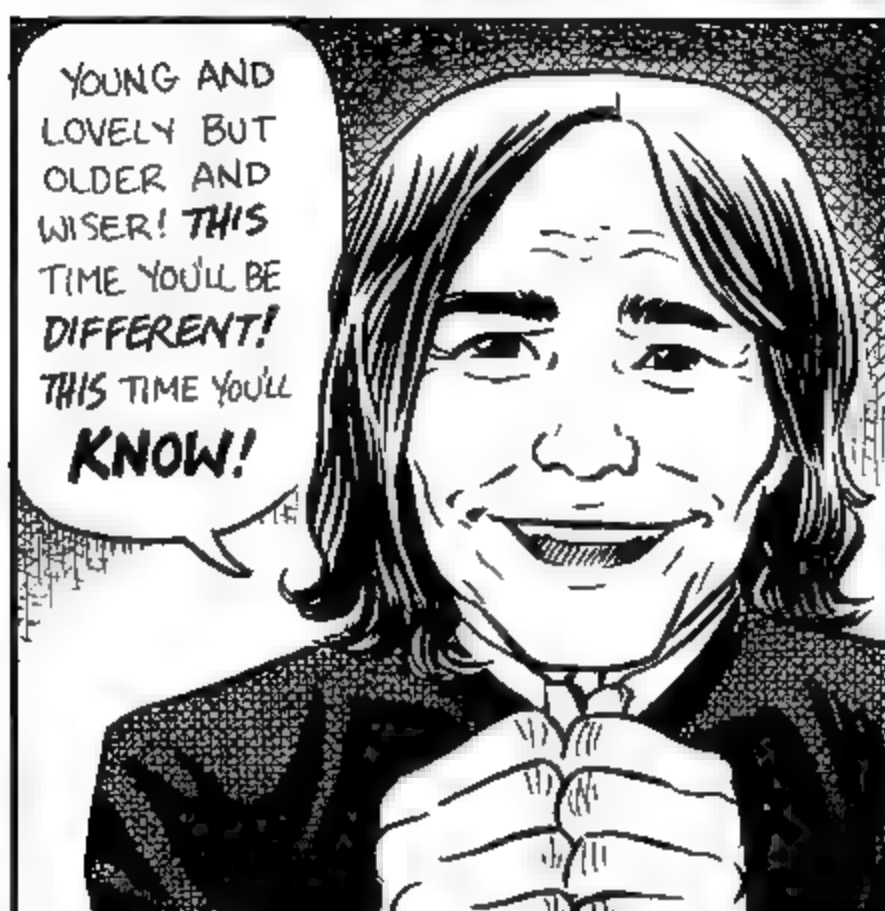
UM-- MUM --
CAN I GET AN
AUTOGRAPH
TOO?

"SO, OKAY, SHE **CAN** STILL
HIT THE E-STRING LIKE
NOBODY ELSE, BUT **THEN**
SHE LOADED ME DOWN
WITH A **TIARA** AND A
COAT OF **ARMS** AND A
SILK **SASH** AND A WHOLE
BUNCH OF **JEWELRY** I'M
NOT ALLOWED TO **SELL**
AND A HUGE EMPTY
STATELY HOUSE.

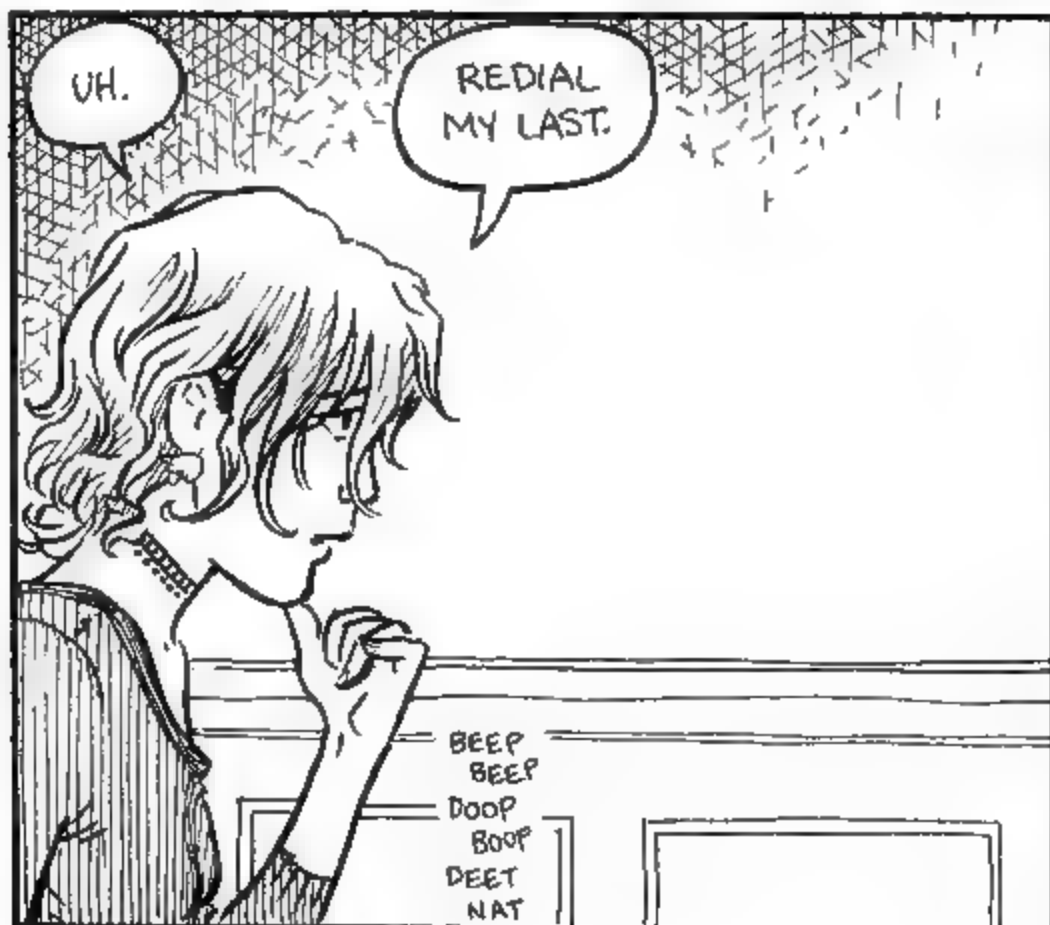
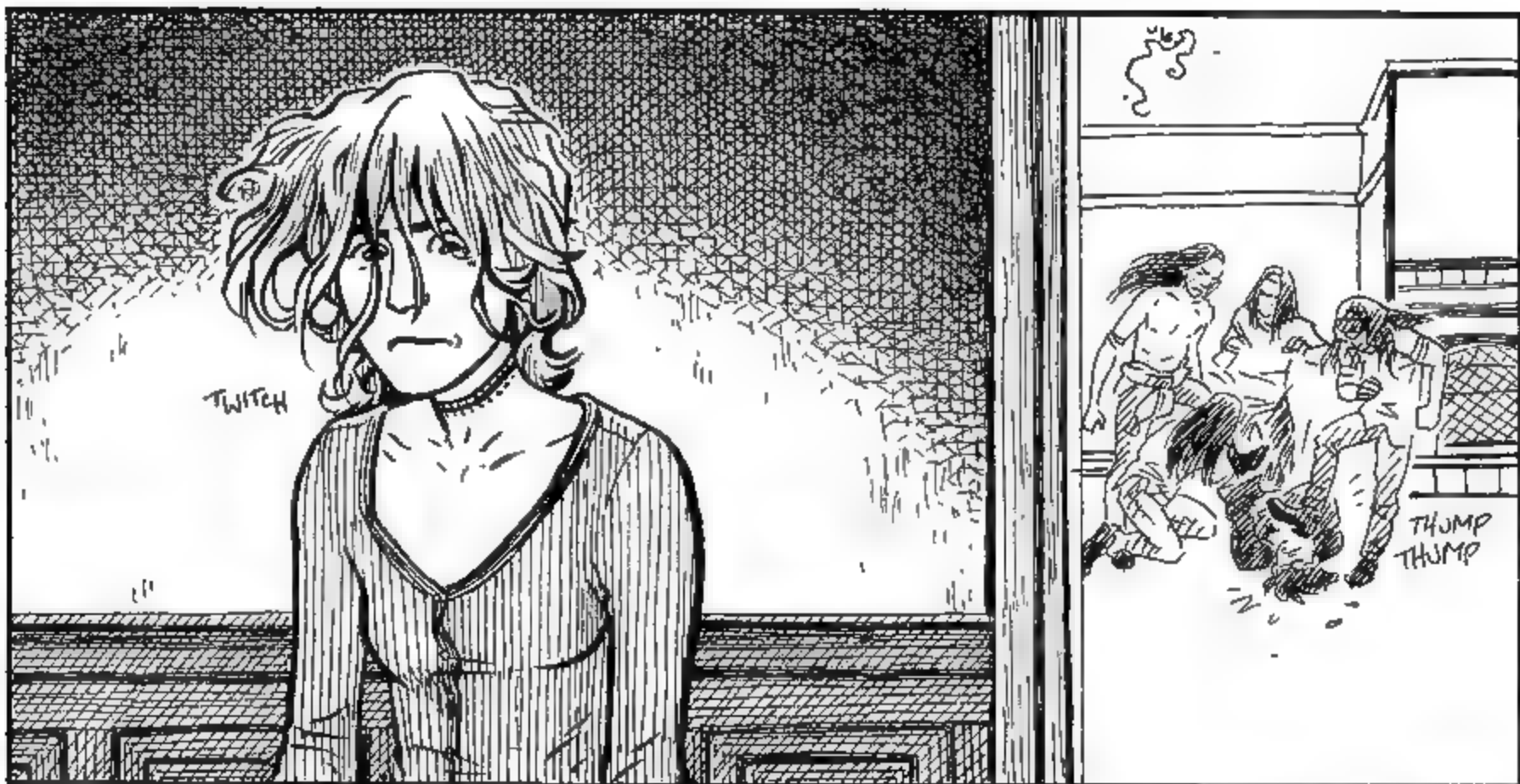


















WHAT I MEAN
IS I GOT WHAT I
WANTED BY
SHUTTING UP.

WHADDYA
MEAN, WHAT
DID I WANT?

ALL MY LIFE I
WANTED TO BE ABLE
TO DO THINGS, FIX THINGS,
MAKE THINGS HAPPEN.
WITHOUT FEELING LIKE A
CONNIVING WHORE.

BUT THEN
WHAT?

I HAVE THINGS I WANT
FOR MYSELF, FOR MY FAMILY,
BUT — IF I GET A HANDLE ON
HOW TO DO THINGS, GREAT, BUT
WHAT THE HELL DO I *DO*?

AND, MORE
IMPORTANT,
WHO *FOR*?



HEY!

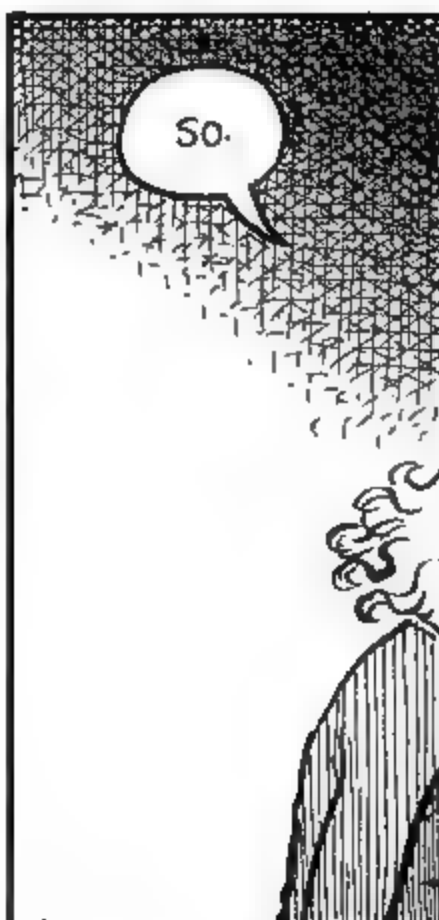
THAT'S THE
CHIEF, ISN'T
IT?



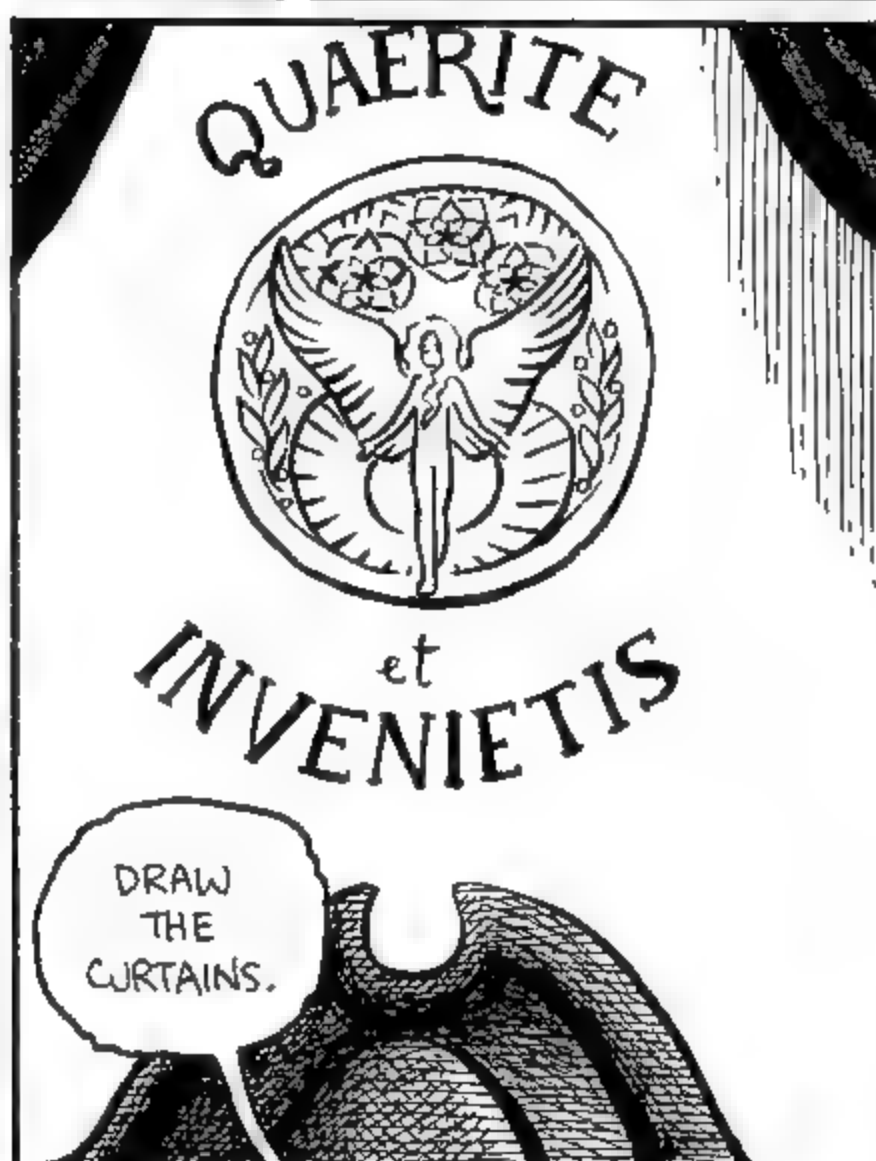
IF MR. COWARD DOESN'T
LIKE MATTRESSES, FINE,
BUT TAKE HIM UP TO THAT
GREEN BEDROOM. THERE'S
A NICE THICK AMARNAN
RUG UP THERE.

GO ON, HE'S
OLD, HE'S NOT
SLEEPING ON A
DIRTY HARDWOOD
FLOOR!









SEEK



ye and
SHALL FIND

COVER

This was an attempt at a "window" image, something simple and gnomic which would sum up the story as best I could in a single image. The focus of much gallery art is to exist on its own as a single image. Comics work in sequence, so selection of images for covers is often at odds with the type of art they are meant to represent. I try to do something that says, "If you stick with it long enough to figure out what this means, it'll be worth it."

At any rate, I liked the thematic contrast between the title, *Voice*, and the gesture, which says "silence." Bildungsromans in prose are often about boys becoming men. Get into visual media and there are a lot more girls becoming women. Finding one's voice = coming into power = maturity, yatata yatata yatata.

PAGE 7

There are five chapters in this book, and I hoped to suggest Rachel's progress with them. Here, she is one of many pawns, interchangeable, disposable, and anonymous.

PAGE 8

Pawns again: A large number of girls who look almost identical competing in a beauty pageant. They look even more alike than the typical run of pageant girls for a reason; familiar though beauty pageants are, their reasons for competing are a bit different. The stakes are higher. The parents of these girls are members of a large, powerful, multi-family clan called the Llaveracs. The proper pedigree alone does not guarantee full membership in the clan. Each young person who applies for full membership into his or her parents' clan (and there are many, many more than just the one these girls are trying to get into) must compete for entry according to his or her clan's standards. For instance, Lejeb clan kids have to pass rigorous mental math marathons. Medawar girls have to graduate medical school. Milos must present and defend their doctoral theses in history. Each clan follows what it values, and the Llaveracs are, among other things, drama queens. They wouldn't dream of holding an examination like this without turning it into a circus. So... beauty pageant, because they

have very strict notions as to what their members should look like.

PAGE 9

Gettin' in on the judges. Bit risque for your typical pageant, but the things Llaveracs consider to be in poor taste are best described as complicated. Best hope I never find time to depict Llaverac kiddie pageants, because they're just horrifying.

PAGE 10

My poor agent.

Uhm, yes, in much the same way that Tolkien's dwarves all look male at first glance, all Llaveracs look female. They are not hermaphrodites. The males just have curvy figures and feminine or gender-neutral names and cultivate a feminine appearance. They do have all the boy stuff, but they keep it all inside. Literally. They have a natural "tuck" kinda like a dolphin. Back to what few things Llaveracs think are inappropriate... calling attention to one's boy bits, should one have them, appalls them.

The judge who nearly lost an eye is the clan's own representative. The guy sitting to her left is there representing Medawar clan, who specialize in medicine and criminal justice, a down-to-earth, brown-bread kind of people who decry the fripperies that Llaveracs love but still can't stay too far away from them. Big rivalry.

PAGE 11

Girl in foreground is our protagonist, Rachel. Rachel's a girl. I'm pretty sure.

In the background: dad's got a boob window. And no, that she calls him "dad" doesn't automatically ensure that "he" is male. Llaveracs juggle pronouns and they don't care how many they drop.

PAGE 12

Rachel's unmaking herself. The exaggerations of female glamour are such, you can put them on a woman, a man, a child, a whatever, and some of the response will still elicit. It's amazing how artificial it is, and how it can still affect

you in spite of your awareness of its artificiality. I will never get tired of picking it apart.

Rachel's friend Veronike, or Vero, is a Lejeb. They all have that funny two-toned hair naturally. Most clans' exams are televised, but few are as closely watched as the Llaveracs'.

PAGE 13

Little floaty screens. I don't have rocket boots in this world, or neon hula hoops, but I do have little Magic Computer Windows. People who have had computers surgically inserted into their brains can summon up little dynamic touchscreens out of thin air. Celebrities can wander the streets surrounded by haloes of tiny newspaper articles about them. Vero's just studying.

PAGE 14

This is Marcie, Rachel's youngest sister. Rachel, Marcie, and their middle sister Lynne are all daughters of Emma, who is a full-member Llaverac, and Brigham, a full-member Medawar. To say that the families frown upon mixed marriages would be saying too little. Rachel takes after her mother. Lynne and Marcie don't.

PAGE 15

Marcie is working as a page for the competition. Their grandfather is quite rich and powerful, heading a major movie studio. Grandmother, who is not seen in this book, is a comparatively mousy, tweedy creature. But still, these names and characteristics don't necessarily mean "granddaddy" is actually male, nor "grandmum" female. The Llaveracs like all the controversy, but are quick to slap the hands of people who speculate too tediously.

PAGE 16

Trudi's one of the pageant organizers, and more than a bit plump for her clan. So she's gone all Belle Epoch with it.

Can't remember for the life of me which clan the dude in the suit represents. Probably my notes on him are in *that* tottery stack of notes over there. On the bottom.

PAGE 17

Aha, there's Grandad. Maternal grandfather, or so says the paperwork, but really, this clan does love sexual anonymity. Married couples either go into hiding when a female begins showing signs of pregnancy, or they both affect maternity clothes (leopard-print, natch), or they avoid the whole thing by using surrogate mothers to actually carry their offspring to term. Stretch marks; what a dirty job!

PAGE 18

All the showgirls, buttering-up wherever they can. At night, Panel 2, the Llaverac clan judge is showing off another of a long line of his own illegitimate children. Lord Rod has a mission.

The major clans have a peerage system of earls and barons and knights and such. Many have royal heads of state. The way titles are passed down isn't always what one might expect.

PAGE 19

The Lejeb judge is Vero's uncle. Milo judge is Medina, who is the head of her clan. Maugeri isn't a major clan, since they aren't rich enough to grab a place at the table. Then there's Lord Rod, testing the waters.

PAGE 20

Trooping home. Rachel and Marcie live in Anvard, which is a huge multileveled city. Fancy elevators take pedestrians from level to level. The amount of daylight any given neighborhood gets depends on its proximity to the inner skin of the dome that protects the whole place from the elements. Some streets closer to the hub of the dome have light piped in from the outside if they can afford it, others make do with streetlights, others do without.

PAGE 21

Full membership in a clan is a necessity for white-collar living. If Rachel gets in, she will at least carry a knighthood, and she'll have enough pull to get her sisters into schools and jobs if they want.

"Dad" is Brigham Grosvenor, a Medawar man, who has been a little out of it for a very long time.

PAGE 22

Any clan family member who doesn't win full membership is considered culled from the herd. Marcie doesn't look Llaverac enough to compete, and Lynne wouldn't do it to save Jesus from the Martians. Their family has always been on easy terms with a lot of non-clan people, spent a lot of time living outside the city. So Marcie hasn't thought much about her mixed parentage.

PAGE 23

The Ascians are not a clan. They are a tribal nomadic group recently taken up residence in greater numbers in Anvard. Everybody in Anvard is either in a clan, attached to a clan, or works for a clan. They run everything. A large number of people wash in and out of the city on a regular basis, living outside for varying lengths of time, but the Ascians live mostly outside. They are not affiliated with any clan. This is not the easy way to live.

PAGE 24

A night neighborhood is one that is never or almost never lit, even by streetlights. Sometimes the residents pool money to have the streets lit for special occasions. This one is lit only by wild growing TV kudzu. There is no sky in Anvard, only roof.

Note that she isn't holding an actual cell phone. Rachel has a skull computer, and so her phone connection is activated by her making "phone hand" and concentrating. Yeah, pretend to talk on the phone for emphasis in a conversation, you will find yourself running down your minutes.

Rachel got off at the wrong stop to get away from the quarrelling Ascians. Never a good idea if you are a fictional character. Now is the right time for readers to start yelling "Hang up the phone! Don't go down there!" She's actually just headed for the next lift over, perfectly safe...

PAGE 25

Bye-bye, ring.

PAGE 26

And bye-bye, chapter one.

PAGE 27

Chapter two: from Pawn to Victim.

PAGE 29

Their sister Lynne has a number of little apartments all over town. Marcie knows where all of them are, and how to get in. Rachel only knows about two, and neither of them are the nice ones.

Lynne. Lynne, Lynne, Lynne. Lynne's mother was a female Llaverac who married a male Medawar. Dad thought it only right to let his wife take care of the kids and didn't even realize one of his daughters was a son until quite late in the game, as Lynne was born with the Llaverac boy bits. Bng just never got his head around the idea.

Information is currency in some circles of Anvard. Lynne is an info-trader, who peddles physical and digital files of any and everything. An infotrader is something between an investigative journalist, a pornographer, a spy, and whatever else he or she can think of to do to use the right piece of information at the right time. Lynne is, in short, everything Rachel is not.

PAGES 30-31

Rachel loves her sister, and really would do anything for her, but so would Lynne. Marcie knows which side of her bread is buttered. Marcie does like being with Rachel, just to be with a sister that she doesn't have to be appalled and occasionally afraid of, but she doesn't understand Rachel in the least. Lynne adopted Marcie when Marcie was born, and her relationship to Marcie is pretty much Lynne's only redeeming quality.

PAGE 32

That didn't take long.

Marcie is the star of a book earlier in the *Finder* series, called *Talisman*. Marcie's talisman is this book, which was in the stolen bag.

Beep boop. Even I'm not sure what equipment is in this sanctum of Lynne's.

PAGE 33

Grandad's house is always open to them, partly because it's so damned big Grandad might never know they're in there. Rich Anvardians pay for cubic footage.

PAGE 34

Write, Marcie, write. Marcie does insist on writing with a pen on an actual piece of paper.

PAGE 35

Back at the competition, next day. Loverlee costume, loverlee handler. Handlers are like personal trainers.

PAGE 36

Yes, the ring does matter.

PAGE 37

The Llaveracs are ruled by a queen (of course). The crown does not pass down by primogeniture. Think getting into the clan is weird? Wait till their Academy Awards get handed out.

A full clan member can marry someone of the proper heritage who isn't a full clan member. The full member then may pass down his or her ring to one of his or her offspring. If the kid gets in, then the ring belongs to that kid. That kid may choose to pass his or her ring to a full sibling, a half sibling, or a total stranger if he or she chooses. The recipient of the ring then has a chance to compete for membership in that clan. So the rings may be passed around quite a bit, but they are not owned communally by a family. The latest winner of membership is the owner, and is legally free to refuse any petition to pass it to someone else. Lots of titanic family rifts over things like this.

PAGE 39

Let's misbehaaaaave!

PAGE 40

There are a lot of freestanding buildings in Anvard, though everything's floor is something's ceiling. Many buildings retain the peaked roofs of architectural styles developed to keep off the weather. Why is that, given that most neighborhoods are not open to the inner skin of the dome, let alone the sky? There is still

weather in large enough spaces in Anvard. Water vapor still collects and drifts around and occasionally creates rain in some areas. Even in those areas that don't commonly experience that still have to deal with overhead things that leak. And the rich folks are always doing things like building snow machines. That's why, in spite of the streets being enclosed, there are still sewer drains, and the cars still have windshield wipers.

Medawars are all cops (inside the city) or soldiers (outside). The rank and medal markings on the cop's face are not tattoos, but attention-enhancing biofoils. No reason they shouldn't reflect rank and honor.

PAGE 41

John Grosvenor, Rachel's first cousin. Son of her father Brigham's brother Marcus.

He says he's marrying "a nice anesthesiologist"—all female Medawars are in medicine. They start medical training as kids. Med Scouts do the same things as Girl Scouts, but they stitch up their craft projects with surgical knots and their cookies all have rather unusual ingredients.

PAGE 42

Brigham had a ring, yes. He could have passed it on to someone else. In a way, he did: He stood at the highest point of a vista overlooking the lower city and threw it as hard as he could. Someone could have found it. He was pissed over being punished (reassigned to a very remote army post) for marrying outside of his clan. He thought of this as a gesture of defiance.

The Pax Lares is a large, overarching document that regulates twelve of what were then the most powerful clans, organizing their political relationships and attempting to place checks and balances on their power. The ring thing was meant to keep any one clan from becoming too numerous.

PAGE 43

I was originally going to have poor, messed-up Dad still living with his wife in her weird semi-

organic tree apartment, but when I got around to inking the book, it seemed more likely that Emma had enough money to have him cared for somewhere else. He is almost never himself anymore.

PAGE 44

"Aunt Dess" is Odessa Irwin, Brigham's sister. She never made doctor, because no ring was available to her. She's a hell of a good nurse.

Yes, John just made a sort of reflexive pass at Rachel. Everybody's raised to think of Llaveracs as the sexiest, most glamorous things that ever walked. Having Rachel for a cousin is pretty missing-top-step for him: too close to remember his place all the time.

PAGE 45

Brigham is pretty vigorous for as out of it as he is.

PAGE 46

Female full-clan Medawars wear their hair in elaborate braids. For surgeons, this means wigs. Dess is not full clan, but she still puts her hair up. Hair hanging loose looks immature to her.

PAGE 47

There you go: fancy braids.

That still image of Jaeger is part of a film clip of him jumping Brigham's doctor. The other family photos are film clips as well. More on who Jaeger is later.

PAGE 48

This is Emma, maiden name Lockhart, mother of Rachel, Lynne, and Marcie, wife of Brigham, daughter of crazy grandad from the beauty pageant party. She is a full Llaverac clan member, and passed her ring on to Rachel. She isn't really the performing arts type, preferring botany, gardening, landscape art. By trade, she is now a Rememberer, which is a topic for another book, but it means she's not around very much either. She also earns enough money doing it to live in this weird living elven-princess apartment where grass grows on the floor and the couches and chairs are alive and covered with moss and leaves and sometimes berries.

PAGE 49

Zing!

"Rodzina" or "Rodzhina" is Polish, and means "family." It isn't used as a personal name in Polish, as I understand it.

PAGE 50

The rank of Earl is closest to king (or ruling queen, as in this case). Even though the rings get passed around a lot, they do become orphaned from time to time. If the holder dies without officially passing his or her ring down, it reverts to the Crown. The Llaverac queen has entrusted one of her earls with the dispensation of whatever rings come back orphaned.

Zing!

Brigham fathered a child on his brother's wife with the brother's full knowledge and consent. There is a term for this kind of consent, which is a big fat open secret in the clans, and Rachel will encounter it in her turn, later in life. It happens between full clan members, and isn't always a great idea, but physical conformation to an imagined standard is very important to most clans. There is push and pull between the desire for the familiar and the unfamiliar, even among people whose variations are so subtle that they barely exist.

Brig and Emma had better reasons for wanting "insurance" than most. They wanted to break free of restrictive customs, they did love each other, but they were aware of how screwed any kids they had together would be. At least ONE kid had to gain full membership to give the others any chance.

PAGE 51

Here's Lynne again, in club drag. And the second of way, way too many bars and night-clubs, hoo boy. Why did I make this book so atmospheric? My hands hate me.

PAGE 52

I found this costume of Lynne's in a Japanese fashion magazine, so it was out of date for Japan before the camera's flashbulb cooled, but it suits her very well. Lynne has boobs, and

enjoys kicking the shit out of people who stare at them when she shows them off.

Lord Rod's library: purely for the beauty of books. Most content is stored on computers, in memory palaces, online, etc., etc. Rod likes dead trees.

Live tree: All the trees in Anvard are in pots. Like Coconino County. Well, there is a ground level that has dirt, and there are trees growing in that dirt. People put little walls around them to make them look like they're in pots.

PAGE 53
Incunabula! One of the best words ever.

PAGE 54
Note that Lord Rod is wearing his own ring. Presently.

PAGE 55
You don't have boys with boobs and an endocrine balance that's very good for male fertility. Boy junk hangs loose for a reason. Male Llaveracs aren't terribly fertile. That's why Lord Rod has such a reputation as a rake. He must be working pretty hard, especially at his age, to make that many babies.

PAGE 56
Lynne is haloed by "snake eggs," little flying cameras with huge memory storage, in this case slaved to her mind. Whatever draws her attention—a sound behind her, a half-seen gesture, whatever—attracts the attention of one or more snake eggs. Lynne doesn't want to miss a thing.

At least Rachel knows she's got Lynne's full attention.

PAGE 57
The more Lynne acts like a bad tempered drag queen, the more trouble you're in.

Lynne has been alienated from Rachel since Rachel hit puberty. Rachel was never a Med Scout; Lynne was. Lynne suspected Rachel wasn't of mixed parentage long before it ever occurred to Rachel, because it basically never occurred to Rachel.

PAGE 59
Phantom.

Phantom's name is Jaeger.

PAGE 60
Not literally a phantom. But Jaeger comes and goes, he is half Ascian, he was one of Bingham's non-clan soldiers. Complicated.

PAGE 61
Third step: From pawn to victim to sidekick.

PAGE 62
Another bar! Yay. Blue-collar non-clan place.

Those of you who are looking at the penciled version of this page on-line: the inked version is two panels, where the penciled one was only one. The pacing works better with that panel border across the middle: top of the panel serves as a scene-setter, bottom starts the action, such as it is.

PAGE 63
Bingham's family came back to the city without him. He lived apart from them for quite a while, partly in prison. More about that in *Finder: Sin Eater*.

PAGE 64
I think she's talking to Vero again, but she's got a lot of friends. Rachel views the phone as a form of divination. Need to make a decision? Don't roll dice or check your horoscope, call up each and every one of your friends. Peer-o-mancy.

PAGE 65
The whole underwear-as-outerwear thing has always fascinated me. T-shirts, after all, used to be underwear, and now they're standard uniform. Rachel is wearing a bodyliner which does all manner of things. It generates her little floaty touchscreens, if nothing else. And wicks sweat.

That guy is from a Moebius drawing I just happened to spy when I needed an extra.

Page 66-67
Rachel is easily challenged. This doesn't change the primal nature of the confrontation.

PAGE 68

Boing.

PAGE 69

An Alexandrian solution.

PAGE 70

Mmm...yeah, I'm not getting into this one in this book. It's not crucial to the plot.

PAGE 71

First of several like-a-looks.

PAGE 72

Individual clans have clan-specific how-to-bring-up-baby books, based on the expected personality range and traits of a full blood child of that clan. They have clan-specific fashion designers and shopping in which the available sizes are skewed towards what's average for that clan. Llaveracs tend to have narrow feet, so the shoes in the really high end malls are very pinchy to everyone else. Doctors sometimes specialize in particular clans, as they tend to have the same problems, not even getting into the issues of inbreeding. Medawars and Llaveracs both have brown eyes, so Jaeger's light-colored eyes were a source of endless amazement to Rachel as a child.

PAGE 73

These like-a-looks are from the Cole Porter number. Meowwwrrrr.

PAGE 74

So the guy they're looking for is the guy that just left Rachel, and Rachel really didn't pick up on it.

PAGE 75

In the photo with Jaeger (it's a physical piece of photo paper for once) are Jan and Tasha. They're based on Janis (from the Electric Mayhem Band) and Natasha (of Bons and), cartoon hotties of my youth; how I love them.

Oh, yeah. That black top Rachel is wearing is the top half of another bodyliner smartsuit.

PAGE 76

Pedro's is just a regular girlie bar most nights

a week. Ped o's is the name it uses on Dude Night.

Jaeger worked as a bouncer on Dude Night at Ped o's on occasion, and he left his "calling card."

PAGE 77

Rachel's skull computer stores her phone numbers. So she doesn't even have to remember which button is whose on her speed dial.

PAGE 79

That TV kudzu gets everywhere. It is mechanical, but it does grow.

PAGE 80

Here's Brom. Brom is also in *Sin-Eater* and *Five Crazy Women*.

PAGE 81

You can have a messy desk and lose things even if none of it is on little slips of paper, and no memory is endless.

PAGE 82

Brom is a vampire cowboy. I will tell his whole story sometime.

PAGE 83

This guy does have a street name, but if I tell you now it won't be as funny.

PAGE 84

There's the gunshot wound, arriving at great speed. And the senior Med Scouts, cleaning the waiting room.

PAGE 85

Yep, that's the only one she can remember. She'll find a pen eventually.

This is basically an alley with a few boards to separate it from the street. It also has a few rooms through the outside walls of the adjoining buildings. Anvardian buildings are a bit termite-moundy.

PAGE 86

This guy was originally designed to look like Joe from the kids' show *Blue's Clues*, played

by Donovan Patton. I thought making him cute as pie would be a pleasant tension between appearance and impact. He's a twinkie hit man. The weird goatee came later, after a lot of people got confused about how much like Jaeger he looked.

Fingers bend like this after they've healed from being broken. Repeatedly.

PAGE 87

This tells you a little of what Jaeger does for a living. He's not in the Army anymore.

Poor Rachel. She needs a pen.

PAGE 88

I like the old moon-on-the-privy-door thing. I like the idea that the men's room should have a sun on it, but historically this wasn't the case. The crescent shape wasn't even all that common, and it was just for ventilation.

PAGE 89

Rachel knows this symbol is associated with Jaeger, because he had it tattooed on his hands. Usually on his hands.

PAGE 90

Back when most people weren't literate, shop signs were just images. Criminal societies still retain this "we're meeting here tonight" signifier. Hang the snake on the lamp. The crown and the wings are always there. It's just poker night for most people.

PAGE 91

The fourth panel was originally intended to be a sort of Jaime Hernandez quote. In one of his weirder Izzy Ortiz stories, he depicted a bunch of creepy old ladies doing something awful to Isabel in a fever dream, and in one panel there were a bunch of severed tentacles on the floor by/around one old lady/witch/demon figure's sandalled feet. I wanted to do something similar here, where it'd be kind of creepy, but the tentacles are just from careless calamari preparation. But I'm not Jaime, so it didn't come off, so I changed it in the final version to a skinned whole deer carcass. Given Rachel's physique, and her cloven-hoof boots, it seemed creepier.

PAGE 92

Creepy old daddy bears. Don't mess.

These are the local patriarchs. They run the neighborhood. They're not actually all mobsters.

PAGE 94-95

In the inking process, I split page 94 into two, to make the painted ceiling more impressive, and to emphasize the transition from the warm, old-school kitchen to the sparkly suburban mall street.

PAGE 96

Another bar! Yay!

Fern bar. Nice place for nice girls. She ran away from the pubs for a while.

PAGE 97-98

Slow-speed chases can be very suspenseful. She runs out; he follows. She runs to the bus stop; can't make the bus come faster. He's going to catch her before she can get on. She runs; she can leap onto the bus through its rear door. Unfortunately that doesn't keep him from getting on too.

PAGE 99

I love drawing this idiotic Llaverac couple. Just because that one has mutton-chop sideburns doesn't mean he's the male. On the other hand, it doesn't mean he isn't. They could both be male. Or both female.

As a full member of her clan, Rachel would also have an exceptionally good chance at establishing a relationship with a banker, who would help her start her personal endeavors. Many clan people are landlords. Llaveracs do enjoy restoring old buildings or furniture or what have you, given how ludicrous the sums of money that building something new would take. They like making things pretty. It's part of their religious devotions, insofar as they have religion.

The Red Ripleys tattoo themselves with jigsaw puzzle pieces, according to their rank in their cell. It's a big, very organized gang.

The Sweathogs I used just because I love the name. Hogs don't sweat.

The Sweathogs and the Red Ripleys and all the rest are the street-level affiliations of non-clan people. They maintain their freedom by buying favors with powerful clan members. The bigger gangs spread themselves around, not wanting to be any one clan's personal army. The As-cians have no patron to protect them.

PAGE 101

They do work. They're just outrageously unfair.

PAGE 102

I draw too many empty streets in this city. At least this joint's got a crowd: opening night (free wine) for a suspense thriller starring a Llaverac. One thing's for sure about being a star in this city, if you have clan hentage, you probably won't have any trouble finding a body double, or a stunt double, or another actor to play your character old, or young, or dead. Roll 'em out!

There are traditional holiday plays that call for specifically typecast actors from the twelve major clans. The clan people have specific roles, like the Commedia Dell' Arte or pantomimes. Funnier still is when these plays are performed by children of all one clan, wearing iconic signifiers that represent the other clans. "Why do I have to be the Llaverac? I don't want to wear the boobs!"

PAGE 103

I love restroom signs. The regular glyphs that stand for "men pee in here" and "women pee in here" don't look like anybody I know.

PAGE 104

Llaveracs are always ready to share cosmetics and swap clothes. Not to do so would be Letting The Side Down. Refusing to share water at the wells, that sort of thing.

Yes, *thank* you, Donnie. I think I listened to every Coen brothers movie I own while I was working on this last rush to complete *Voice*. I can't listen to music or the radio while I work. The tracks are too short and make me itch. I like to listen to conversations when I'm work-

ing. The Coen brothers write the best dialogue. And their soundtracks are amazing. And yet I don't listen to their music soundtracks. Eh.

PAGE 105

Rachel's made a huge effort to change her look to more glitz-style Llaverac in hopes of confusing her stalker dude.

PAGE 106

See? She found a pen. Even with a skull computer, she still has to write things on her arm from time to time.

Little corner grocery with an upstairs room. Totally illegal. That's why there is no upstairs. Not for her, anyway.

Page 108

Ha ha, Rachel. You're a ho-bag.

Yes, honey, those are the same two guys who were fighting on the Schart Street lift. Incidentally, I picked the name Schart because of all the books I have in my studio illustrated by Trina Schart Hyman. Beautiful stuff.

PAGE 109

The thug from the corner grocery is clearly a Red Ripley, as is the woman who runs the place. The thug, Baldamar Martin, is also an indentured servant on the lam from his master. He entered into an indenture, or limited period of semi-slavery, in lieu of prison time. He's moonlighting as a bouncer unbeknownst to Lord Jaynes, who holds his indenture papers. Mr. Martin is deeply in trouble.

PAGE 110

If Rachel wasn't in full Llaverac drag, if it wasn't conformation competition time, if there was anything the cops meant to charge her with, she really wouldn't be able to stomp out of the precinct house just any old time. The other cops know she's only there because Kelley felt like harassing her.

PAGE 111

Enter Psykhe! She's the One Girl Llaverac encounter. Three at the beginning, with the three girls at the Crescent bar, looking for drugs. Two

on the bus, discussing real estate and local gang activity. And last one, here, in the form of Psykhe, who is following the conformation pageant closely and has in short order become a fervent Rachel fan.

PAGE 112

Every girl who wins full membership in Llaverac clan is knighted. All other titles revert to the Crown upon death—none are passed down to a child, but are awarded to newly-minted full members as available.

PAGE 113

That's the problem with competing. You can go in solidly wanting just to do well, willing to settle for less, ready to be satisfied that you did the best you could with what you had, and next thing you know you'll die if you don't WIN.

PAGE 114

Plague year. I haven't mentioned the local nasty diseases since *Sin-Eater*. I'll get around to them eventually.

PAGE 115

Yes, Rachel ran afoul of some Medawar Lester Molester back in the distant outpost. And, no, she shouldn't blame herself for his actions; she was a child. She's wrestling with where her responsibilities do begin. Adulthood isn't a transformation—one day you're not one, next day you are—but if initiative and accountability don't start on your eighteenth birthday, how far back do you go? This is an easy question to answer for some people, and a very hard one for Rachel.

PAGE 116

Paul Colbert (or Colvin or whatever I chose at the last minute) isn't a bad cop. He knows his neighborhoods, he knows the people in them.

PAGE 117

Da-daa... this is Jaeger's younger half-brother Roy, who was last seen as a small child way, way back in *Fight Scene*, which has become part of *Sin-Eater*. Roy gets to play knight in shining armor as far as Rachel's concerned, because she'll fall in love with anybody who solves her latest problem.

Rachel didn't end up on this doorstep accidentally. This is one of the addresses Brom gave her. Brom knows Roy because Brom knows Jaeger.

PAGES 118–119

Roy was deliberately designed to look like a cute teeny-bop version of his older brother. I think he'll do.

PAGE 121

Roy's mother was a blonde fluffy sort of girl who knew a way out of the company town when she saw one. Roy and Jaeger's father may have been half Ascan.

PAGE 123

Lots of clan people are culls. It isn't the end of life. But if she doesn't win her membership, Rachel has to depend on her mother and grandparents for a lot of things. As a cull, she probably couldn't get a major bank loan. She can own property, but not a lot. She can go to college, but only if someone sponsors her. It's either go home and do what Mom and grandfolks want, or find a sponsor. Sponsors don't always expect to have sex with their proteges, but the protegee had better be mighty talented. Membership brings independence. This society really is a club.

Roy's not broke, but he can't afford the software that keeps the millions of pop-up ads out. He has the homemade stuff, but the wars between the advertisers and the consumers gallop on apace.

PAGE 124

Rachel actually feels bad that her family has never done anything for Roy. She was raised with noblesse oblige, in buckets.

PAGE 125

His full name is Royal Sudamer Ayers. So says a lot of paperwork. Most of Jaeger's paperwork, such as there is, says all different things.

PAGE 126

There are seasons in Anvard. The dome is not glass, but a very complex and only half broken structure which absorbs light, heat,

and other radiant energy into its outer skin, filters some of it, and doles the rest out to its interior through its inner skin. It also breathes. It would do a lot of other things if it didn't have so many holes in it.

Yes, Roy stole that bench. He's quite the rags to...well, not riches, but fewer rags story.

Roy is extremely proud of this little house, because he owns it outright. He and Jaeger were brought up in a company town far, far away from any city, and these towns are worse than indentured servitude. Digging himself out of that place and learning to make a system work for him to the point that he's not broke and can make himself a place to live is a huge source of pride. More about what he actually does for a living in some other book.

PAGE 127

The joke about leaving a beer and a bowl of cat food on the porch is one we used to make about one of the several people Jaeger is based on.

PAGE 128

It's a hollow book because books are talismanic to Marcie.

PAGE 129

That used to be a Totoro. Marcie had it in *Sin-Eater*. Emma was in a male drag phase when she met and married Bringham. The bronze star is awarded for valor on the battlefield.

PAGE 130

Yes, Roy. No, Roy. Sometimes, Roy.

PAGE 133

He's not a bad boy.

PAGE 134

Rachel is not-so-secretly kinky for masculine-looking men. This hasn't helped her adjust to the idea of throwing in her lot with the Llaveracs.

PAGE 135

More fight! Fight! Fight!

PAGE 136

Oh, it's Brom. And the stalky guy. Hi guys.

Ta daa! Stalky guy's street name is Snatch. Because his very dense black goatee has no shape, it grows right up to the margin of his lower lip. He also has a big red scar in a very suggestive spot on his chin. I decided to give this dreadful characteristic because early readers were confused about who Brom was beating up, whether it was Stalky Guy or actually Jaeger. So: horrible beard and awful nickname.

PAGE 138

Blinky.

PAGE 139

Ha ha. Condom exchange. Back to the plague some other time.

PAGES 140–141

There's probably too much stuff in this little abandoned grocery. When Ascians hold a big party like this, it's always a religious ritual. There will be loads of food and booze because that's what their gods like. But they use everything they have, all out. They probably wouldn't have all this stuff on the shelves unused. I wanted Rachel's drunken revenge to be very vivid.

That's Chief Coward, last seen in *King of the Cats*.

PAGE 142

Coward always smiles.

PAGE 143

She needs that.

PAGE 144

All hair, all the time.

PAGE 145

Fourth: femme fatale. Lots of people skip this stage. Whyyyyy?

PAGE 146

There are fewer notes for this book than for previous books because I did a better job of getting the good stuff into the story.

PAGE 147

This neighborhood used to have more money, and therefore more light. That tree was a whole lot healthier once upon a time.

PAGE 148

Lots of theaters, lots of playhouses.

PAGE 149–151

If this was Voodoo, this guy would be Legba. This is a priest dedicated to Olpapa, a doorway deity who is always the first god invoked. He opens the door to the spirit world. As far as the Ascians are concerned, this man is literally Olpapa in the flesh, because to be a priest or priestess means to allow yourself to be possessed by the god. All the paraphernalia belongs to the man, and are his personal effects, but the soot-mark across one eye is Olpapa's specific emblem: one eye open, one eye closed. This emblem can be expressed in any way that works: a pair of sunglasses with one lens popped out, a blindfold with a hole cut in it. None of the other spirits can come across until Olpapa does.

These guys with the white crosses painted on their faces are Marosse. Marosse is a death god. All of them are Marosse; he is not picky about who he possesses or how many at one time.

Ascian gods have recently discovered blocked hats. They are in transition, just as their devotees are.

These guys are all speaking for the gods, with the voices of the gods. Are they playing the role of the god, or literally channeling the god? The Ascian who does this would not understand the question. They study their gods, they gravitate to the gods that are the most like them. They are, in a way, the god's fan club. They make themselves suitable to the god's spirit. They hope the god will give them his word to speak into the world of men. This is the nature of their devotions.

PAGE 152

They all assume that there are gods native to this city that they haven't met, and the clans embody them.

PAGES 153–154

They are cutting themselves. Fie to you, black and white book.

PAGE 155

Probably why there are so many Marosse possessions.

PAGE 156

Coward has been trying to pick apart some of the peculiarities of his world all of his life. Now, in his old age, his life has led him here. Outside wasn't that much easier.

PAGE 158

She was supposed to give the bottle of booze to Olpapa. That's her cover charge.

PAGES 159–160

The reason you can do so much while blacked out is because your memory doesn't actually go kaput until you fall down go boom. THEN it rewinds and erases.

PAGE 162

Fragments.

PAGES 164–165

One early reader described this ridiculous dress as a wearable duvet. But look, she had a money dance.

PAGE 166

These Ascians have collected a lot of things over the years. Coward is and has been quite the curious cat, and he raises curious cats.

PAGE 167–168

By "his," they mean Jaeger's. He left it with them way back in *King of the Cats*.

Crazy steam car! Got it straight out of a Richard Scarry book. He rocked the rock house. Love the teapot.

PAGE 169

Can't remember what clever idea I had behind this last evolution-of-Rachel chapter head drawing. It was all structured-storytelling Alan Moore and shit too.

PAGE 170

Ah, little tyrants. They're just irritated, but their irritation changes the course of other people's lives.

But she would never have yelled at them like this yesterday.

PAGES 171–172

There's Marcie. Marcie loves to explore ins and outs, and so she knows all the servants' passages and hidey-holes in this building. There are more than a few.

PAGE 173

Lord Snotrag knows his rings.

PAGE 174

Back when Llewellyn Laverack was alive, the Pax Lares was not even a gleam in its framers' eyes, and lots of rings were made. Most of them do feature the Black Angel, which is a sculpture widely regarded as an icon of Anvard. Like Rodin's *Little Mermaid* in Copenhagen, or America's Statue of Liberty.

"Who the hell are you?" Awww.

Lord Rod does not like Rachel because he does not like her family.

PAGES 175–177

Aha.

It's an open secret in the clan. It would indeed be quite a scandal outside.

PAGE 178

Rachel has no proof, so Rod must be very vulnerable to scandal right now. Or he's just very intrigued.

PAGE 179

Crazy floor show part over; now for the drumrolls.

PAGE 180

Flounce, flounce, flounce. No dissertations for these girls.

PAGE 181

This costume of Rachel's is partly all the handlers could do with her bruising and the circles under her eyes. But mostly spite.

It sets her apart from the others, but she's supposed to be exemplifying an ideal. Even though this really kind of suits her, she's like Jezebel in a red dress while all the other girls are of one kind.

PAGE 182

So now she's back in high school, and all the other girls who sort of didn't like her now hate her.

PAGE 183

Tattoos are discouraged in clan hopefuls. Do whatever you like once you're in.

The Finder glyph is not a tattoo at this point, just Sharpie. The Ascians thought she needed it.

PAGE 184

Uh huh.

PAGE 185

I love the missing top step. YIKES

PAGE 186

On the original pencilled version of this page was a vague scribble and a note about how This Page Shows A Fancy Mansion But I Have Jury Duty.

PAGE 187

See, it was important for Rachel to get past the handlers.

PAGE 188

We're all so used to the words "prince" and "princess" that we don't think of what they mean. They come from the same root as "principal." Just means "first." Like she says. That's why the winner gets a crown.

Rachel wasn't the only one who came away with a title beyond knight. The winner is now a princess, the first runner-up became a countess, Rachel became a duchess, and one other girl became a viscountess.

PAGE 189

The present Llaverac queen is sort of a female Keith Richards.

There's a whole heap of other weird things too; a lot of the nobles have official birthdays entirely independent of their actual birth dates.

PAGE 190

Wish I'd had room to show her casually stepping over the rug as they roll it past the spot where she's standing, but I had to have room for the portrait gallery. The one in the middle is very loosely based on a portrait of Cornelia Vanderbilt.

PAGE 191

Rachel knows her mother lied to her about Lord Rod being her biological father. She doesn't know who her real father is, and doesn't want to get into it.

If she misses her period... yeah, quite a party with the Ascians. Too bad she doesn't remember much of it.

Another day, another stalker, ho hum.

PAGE 192

Llaveracs do look a lot alike. Good news for hopeful obsessives.

PAGE 193

When Ascians are on your side, they're on your side.

PAGE 194

And when they're on your side, what's yours is theirs. But at least she's got bodyguards. And they have a patron.

PAGE 195

Might be talking to Vero again.

PAGE 196

Influence is funny that way. Action and inaction: the outcome depends on the moment.

PAGE 198-199

I thought about having this mattress sink down under her weight, pinning her, and she'd just hang up and go to sleep, but decided against it.

PAGE 200

For his purposes, a very good girl.

"Ask, Seek, and Knock: the Matthews sisters! Everybody give them a big hand! Tip your waitresses!"

PAGE 201

Since the tone of these notes has turned into the tone used on director's commentaries, I'll conclude by saying thank you for reading, I hope you enjoyed it, and there will be more. Good night.

**"FINDER IS, BAR NONE,
THE BEST SF COMIC BEING
PUBLISHED TODAY"**

—*Strange Horizons*

"COMPLETELY FASCINATING."

—Warren Ellis

In the domed city of Anvard, society is defined by an intricate network of clans: the stolid Medawar, the flamboyant Llaverac, and dozens more. Clan membership means status and security; the options for outcasts without the protection of a clan are few and grim.

Rachel Grosvenor has grown up straddling worlds. The daughter of a Medawar father and a Llaverac mother, half raised by her mother's nomadic lover, Rachel has fought her way through the grueling contest for admittance to the Llaverac clan. But just as her social ascent seems inevitable—and her family's future secure—the theft of an indispensable heirloom sends her spiraling into the dark underbelly of Anvard and a paradox that holds the key to her fate:
How do you find a Finder?

**"McNeil is a cartoonist's cartoonist, the kind of
artist that other comics professionals talk about
with a little bit of awe."**

—Douglas Wolk



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